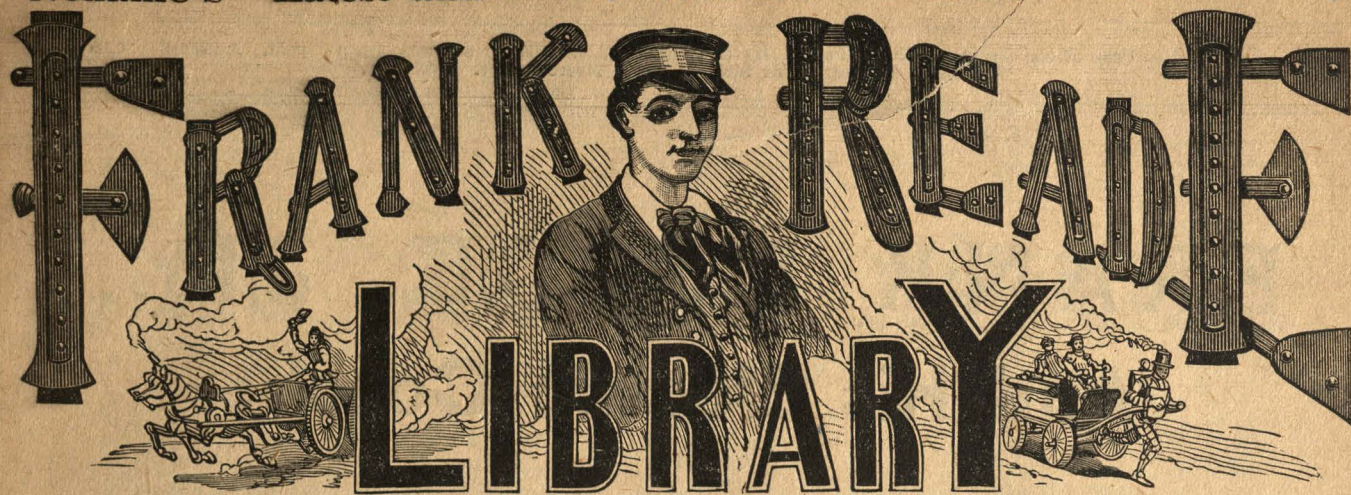


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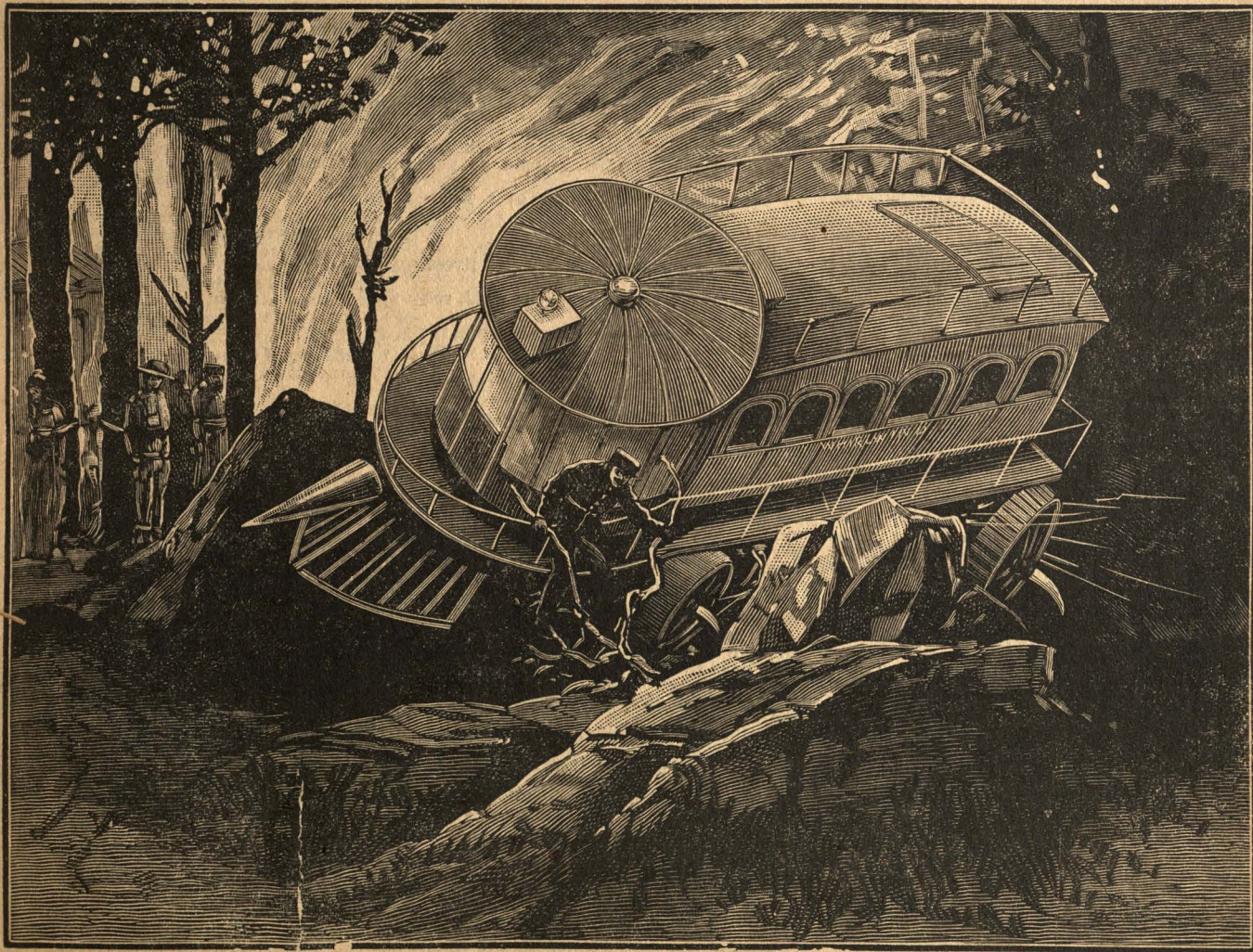
PART II.

AND HIS ELECTRIC COACH;

OR,

The Search for the Isle of Diamonds.

By "Noname."



The coach was upset for the first time! A thrill of dismay shot through Frank, and he shut off the power. He scrambled out through a window and reached the ground.

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FRANK READE, JR.,

And His Electric Coach:

OR,

THE SEARCH FOR THE ISLE OF DIAMONDS.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., Exploring a River of Mystery," etc., etc.

PART II.

CHAPTER XXVI. MAN AGAINST BEAST.

"PITY me, oh merciful God, or I shall perish!"

It was a wild appeal, in weak tones, that came through a great cavern in the rocks, and the supplicating voice had hardly died away when there sounded the trumpeting roar of a bear, near the speaker, who was wedged in a narrow crevice in the wall.

The bear could not get in the cleft at the man, but it inserted one of its massive paws to the full extent of its leg, and by clawing and scratching, it managed to hook the man's jacket on its claws, and strove to drag its victim out, to devour him.

The man was Gerald Fitzgerald, whom Frascuelo, the bandit, had left a bound captive in the cavern, and he had wedged himself in the crevice in the wall by the utmost difficulty, upon finding that the cave was a bear's den.

His sufferings for the past two days had been awful, as not a drop of water had he to quench his intolerable thirst, nor a morsel of food to satisfy the cravings of his hunger.

Discovered and attacked by the huge bear, despite his efforts to conceal his presence there, it seemed at last as if all was in vain, and that his earthly career was at an end.

The long, sharp nails of the sleek, black beast were caught firmly, and the unresisting ranchman felt himself being dragged out of the aperture inch by inch, while at last the bear had its entire paw upon him.

Then he emerged rapidly.

A groan of horror pealed from his lips as he rolled over upon the floor beneath the monster's head.

"But after all," he thought, bitterly, "it is much better to die this way. A cove can't suffer long, as I've, be Jove. Let the brute eat me, and that will be an end to my misery, don't you know?"

He was resigned to his fate.

As a cat toys with a mouse ere its cruel fangs are buried in the hapless victim, the bear snuffed at Fitzgerald, rolled him, pawed at him, and kept up a muttering growl.

"Confound you," impatiently exclaimed the desperate man, "why don't you set to work on me? The anticipation is far worse than the deed. Hey! Boo! Set to—set to!"

He blew at the bear, struck it with his knees, and did all he could to urge it on to end his life.

But the bear was a long time getting mad. When it finally bared its gums, displaying

its formidable teeth, and its roaring grew deeper and hoarser, poor Fitzgerald knew that the time had come for him to say his prayers.

The bear had recoiled a short distance from him, but never once were his vicious round eyes removed from the prostrate ranchman, and then it came for him at a lumbering trot.

Instinctively Fitzgerald knew that it was now intent upon killing him as soon as possible.

The bear reached him—stood over him—and—

*Crack—bang!

It was a rifle-shot at the cave entrance.

"Hurrah! We are in time! He yet lives!" cried the marksman.

"Frank Reade!" gasped poor Fitzgerald, recognizing the voice.

And into the cavern dashed Frank, while the wounded bear with a horrible sound fell down, and rolled over and over with pain.

With one slash of his knife Frank released the young Englishman, and he was about to arise, when the bear got upon its legs again and made a rush for him.

Before it could reach him, Frank sprang between the ferocious beast and the ranchman with his knife in his hand.

He had laid his rifle down to liberate Fitzgerald and did not have time to recover it, if he wanted to aid his friend.

The bear recoiled for an instant, surprised at encountering an opposition in Frank, and went up on its haunches.

Roar after roar of anger pealed from its mouth, echoing through the big cave like thunder, and then it advanced upon Frank, its eyes glaring like balls of fire.

"Run, or it will kill you, me boy!" groaned Fitzgerald, arising.

"No! I am not afraid of it!" dauntlessly answered Frank.

"Then I'll take your rifle and shoot the beggar!"

"Get over near the door, then, and keep our friends out of the way."

There was no time to say any more.

For just as Fitzgerald grasped Frank's rifle, and slowly made his way toward the door, the bear started toward Frank.

He had met almost every species of these beasts in every land, in every kind of battle, and under every condition.

Therefore he knew how dangerous a fight he had before him.

He caught the bear's eye with his steady glance, and held it.

Nor did he flinch, or move an inch.

He held his knife grasped tightly in his hand, drawn back and mentally calculated the most vital spot in the creature's body in which to plant the keen blade.

On came the snarling beast with stubborn courage, and its shaggy paws were held in readiness to strike at Frank a powerful blow, or embrace him in a death dealing clutch.

One step more, and Frank sprang into its arms.

The sharp knife darted forward, pierced the hairy neck, was withdrawn, and as the creature's blood poured from a gaping wound, and its paws came together, Frank darted back.

He just escaped annihilation.

Once in those massive arms, and the breath of life might have all been squeezed out of his body.

A terrible cry of agony escaped the bear, but it did not go down upon all fours as Frank calculated.

There was a convulsive movement of its immense body, and it accelerated its pace toward Frank.

Unfortunately the inventor of the electric coach had his body interposed between Fitzgerald and the animal, so that the ranchman could not get a shot at it without running the risk of hitting Frank himself.

He stood near the entrance to the cavern, outside of which stood Barney, Pomp, Vaneyke and Panchita.

The moment the bear was near enough to Frank again he made another rush and drove his knife in his throat.

This time the beast caught him.

He was drawn close to the animal's body.

Its gaping mouth was opened wide, and it made a motion as if it was going to bury its teeth in Frank's head and tear it in two, when the knife was thrust again and again in its eyes, mouth, neck and body, causing it to try to get away.

Its snarls, whines and roars were terrible.

Its body was soaked with its life fluid.

Frank was covered with it, the walls were spattered and the floor looked like that of a slaughter-house, and still the inventor kept stabbing it strong and rapid blows.

He knew that every ounce of blood the creature lost was rendering it weaker, and that was so much in his own favor.

Thus far the beast did not have an opportunity to bite him, but its claws ribboned Frank's clothes, and the convulsive movements of its

arms gave him some squeezing that was far from pleasant.

He did not attempt to get away from the beast, and it was perhaps due to that fact that the bear became afraid of him, as well as from the fact that every contact it had with him caused it the pain of a fresh wound.

Recoiling from Frank it fell down upon its side, with its tongue lolling from its great red mouth, panting and exhausted.

The crack of Frank's rifle pealed out sharply in Fitzgerald's hands, and the bullet laid the beast over cold in death!

"That is my revenge for all the blasted trouble it gave me," said the ranchman, in satisfied tones.

"A good shot it was, too," commented Frank.

The rest of the party then came into the cavern.

In a moment the lovers were locked in a tight embrace.

Neither of them had expected to ever meet alive again.

Fitzgerald was weak and ill, and the doctor and Frank assisted him down in the ravine to the coach, attended by Panchita, while Barney and Pomp set to work securing the bear skin.

"Shure an' it's none too fasht we kem from ther railroad ter resky Fitz," said Barney, when the hide was taken off, "but instid of this baste schmackin' its chops over the spare ribs an' tindher loins av ther Englishman, it's ther dacent repast it will be afther makin' fer us."

"Golly," returned Pomp, "dis chile nebber look at briled libber or cod fish cakes when dar's dis yer kinder meat in de sto'-room."

He cut off the best portions of the bear's carcass, and they went down after their friends and boarded the Whirlwind.

On the following day they left the canyon.

The volcano's action had stopped two days previously, and the wind had dissipated the intense heat from the atmosphere.

On a near approach to what had been the vast lake that surrounded the isle of diamonds, they discovered that it was now all dried up.

The lava beds had not quite reached the water where the main stream came down from the crater, but the smaller streams that radiated from it had evaporated the lake.

Nothing but a vast mud-bed was to be seen. Most of the bridges were demolished that led from the main to the isle.

There was one, however, over which it was possible to go, and as the electric coach rolled across, they saw that the demolished city of white stone was covered by a coating of dark red dust several feet thick, which had been blown up from the volcano.

Everywhere thereabouts were numberless blackened stones and rocks that were hurled down upon the beautiful city, annihilating it.

It was a desolate scene.

Fortunately any heat that might have been transmitted to the island by the eruption was now all gone, and when the coach reached the city, came to a pause, and all hands alighted, Frank observed:

"The ground is as cool now as it was before the eruption."

"What do you intend to do?" asked the doctor.

"Let us all set to work at gathering as much of the magnificent diamonds together as we can. The vast treasure can be safely hidden, and if we ever again encounter Isaac, the whole thing will revert to me. You remember that he said so?"

"Perfectly well."

"Then you know that we own this isle of diamonds, and all on it."

"There will be no trouble to secure the riches, Frank."

They all scattered among the ruins, and saw that not a single edifice was left standing; all was a chaotic ruin.

It was an easy matter to collect the priceless jewels, which had been cut with a skill, by these primitive people, that outvalued the work of the finest lapidaries in civilization.

All that day they worked assiduously among the fallen pillars, stones and ornaments, lying in the dust, which hid from view what must have been a grandeur of architecture without parallel.

Nothing but heaps upon heaps of debris remained upon which they worked, and as the jewels were but loosely incrustured in their crude settings, they were rapidly dislodged by the treasure-hunters' knives.

Fully a week passed uneventfully by, and during the interval they collected every precious stone that was to be seen, amassing a vast

quantity, in ten huge earthen jars, which they found in the remains of one of the fallen buildings.

By the end of the week their labor was finished.

A late dinner was partaken of, and then, attired in a new suit, Frank shouldered his rifle and started toward the mountain to find a place in which to cache the treasure.

He would not take it away until Isaac made his appearance, and made his word good regarding the princely gift of the treasure.

Frank headed for a mass of rocks a short distance up the mountain, and passed out of view of his friends behind them.

It was a bleak, lonesome region, with no grass or herbage.

The sun was declining, lending the place a more sinister aspect.

He had scarcely gone in among the vast bowlders, when a number of Isaac's men appeared from various places of concealment in the vicinage and crept after him.

They had been watching the treasure-gatherers at work all that week without betraying their presence there, for they were afraid, unarmed, to attack the passengers of the dreaded Whirlwind.

There were only half a dozen of the giants—the remnant of the whole tribe—and their lives had been saved simply by taking refuge in the fastness of the mountain at the time of the eruption.

A bitter, rankling hatred of Frank and his friends was fostered in their bosoms, and they were now bent upon his destruction, out of revenge for having, as they imagined, caused the downfall of the tribe.

When they came upon Frank amid the rocks he was down on his hands and knees, drinking from a spring that gushed out of the ground.

His rifle was out of reach, and one of them secured it.

Then the rest rushed upon him.

A blow on the head from a cudgel, wielded by one of the giants, laid Frank out senseless, and they picked him up and silently went up the mountain with him to carry out their fearful design.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STRANGE GLADIATORS.

In the meantime, while Dr. Vaneyke was entertaining Fitzgerald and Panchita with some antiquarian facts about the people who lived on the island, Barney and Pomp had gotten themselves into a scrape.

The negro left the coach soon after Frank went away, and wandered off amid the ruins, on a search of his own for more of the precious stones, when he came to the spot where Isaac's palace stood, and went in amid the debris.

As he was crossing a section of the flooring which had escaped the dust, owing to the protection of several standing pillars, he suddenly espied a trap door in the stone flagging, with a ring in it.

The coon raised the trap, and cautiously peered down.

There was a flight of stone stairs leading into what seemed to be a deep cellar, which was as light as day, and at the end of it he saw several oval top windows cut through the solid rock foundation by which the place was illuminated.

In the center of the vast apartment was an arena fenced in by stone, around which were numerous tiers of seats like a circus.

The arena was strewn with the scattered skeletons of human beings and at one side of it there stood a huge box of stone, with apertures and a door in it, which could be reached from the audience gallery.

Wondering what kind of circuses the gigantic tribe witnessed in the huge amphitheatre, Pomp was about to retreat, when some one caught him from behind by the legs, gave him a violent shove, and as a whoop of fear pealed from his lips, down the stairs he slid head first.

Bump—bump—bump—bumpety—bump! went poor Pomp, each step thumping him on the face and body, barking his shins, and scratching his hands, as he went skating down on his stomach.

When he reached the bottom he set up a wild howl of agony.

"Fo' de Lawd sake, who done dat?" he roared, pulling a face, and tenderly rubbing his injuries. "Say, who done dat, hey!"

"Begorra, it's meself that don't know," came the voice of Barney accompanied by a terrific explosion of laughter, as he descended the

stairs, for he had followed Pomp from the coach.

The coon arose to his feet and glared balefully at Barney.

"G'way dar, chile—g'way!" said he darkly.

"I'se gwine ter cut yer—I is!"

"Howld on, ye gorilla," advised Barney. "Faith, it's not meself as would be guilty av dhropping yez down thim stairs, but—"

Boom—whang! went a thump, interrupting the innocent Barney's discourse, as Pomp butted him square in the stomach, and away shot Shea over the seats like a sky-rocket and landed in the arena, where he rolled over and over, yelling:

"Murder! Murder! Sure, me wind bag is busted!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" chuckled Pomp. "Reckon I dunno nuffin' 'bout dat neider, honey! How yo' like it yose'l, huh?"

But Barney's agony would only permit him to grunt and groan, and Pomp went down a flight of steps between the seats and peered over the arena wall, down at his unhappy friend with a broad grin.

Unluckily for him the stone, which was greatly cracked, broke beneath the weight of his body, and down fell the alarmed coon into the arena beside Barney.

This time it was the Irishman's time to laugh, and he did it with a vim that drove away all thoughts of his own misery.

Pomp had hurt himself again and got mad.

Hopping to his feet, he grabbed Barney and began to wrestle him.

Around and around the arena they struggled, kicking up a loud clamor and unable to get out, as the encircling wall was fully ten feet high, and they saw no door in its smooth surface.

In the midst of their fight they were suddenly startled to hear a number of gun springs click all around them, and glancing up, they gave utterance to cries of intense alarm at the scene above.

All around the top of the arena wall stood a dozen Mexicans with their rifles pointed at them as if in the act of shooting!

Clutching each other's arms, the startled Irishman and negro stood like statues in the middle of the ring, their jaws dropped, their eyes bulging, and their breath short and stentorian.

"Hold!"

It was the voice of Frascuelo.

Sharply it pealed out through the cellar.

He stood at one side, and our friends saw and recognized him.

Collecting these few remaining men of his destroyed band, he had come back with them to secure the treasure, and they had made a rendezvous of the cellar that day, not knowing Frank's party was there.

Every one of the Mexicans lowered his rifle. "Do not shoot them, boys!" commanded Frascuelo.

"But you told us to," remonstrated one of the men.

"True; but I have changed my mind since."

"Would you let them live?"

"Only long enough for our amusement."

"I fail to understand you."

"Then all listen; they shall fight for their lives."

"Man to man?"

"No—man to beast."

"Ah! I comprehend, senor."

"In yonder huge box with apertures, are a pair of savage pumas formerly kept by Isaac, no doubt, and I will let them loose, half starved as they doubtless are, so that those two picaros may fight them for their lives!"

"Bravo, Frascuelo! It shall be capital sport."

"Like the gladiators of old," went on the bandit, with an evil look, "they shall defend themselves with their hands alone. You can see that they are weaponless. For awhile they may successfully resist the pumas, but inevitably they must fall victims to the savage ferocity of the wild creatures."

"Bravo!" yelled all the men in chorus, delightfully.

"Take your seats, gentlemen," continued Frascuelo, with a most hideous grin, "and I will loosen the beasts from their stone cage, so that we may be amused while we remain here. To judge by the human bones lying in the arena now, it looks as if our friend Isaac and his friends indulged in the same sport with their enemies."

He flourished his hand, and as his men seated themselves around the arena, he went over to the stone cage to open the door, liberate the pumas, and let the beasts spring into the ring and attack Barney and Pomp.

The two victims shuddered, for they understood what was said in Spanish.

They were unarmed.

And could not get out of the arena.

Indeed, had they made an attempt to, no doubt every rifle in the place would be aimed at their hearts and fired.

"Fer ther love av Heaven, what be's we ter do?" whispered Barney.

"Git eat up, I spec," said Pomp, with a long face.

"Shure it's wild bastes we must be afther foightin' wid our fishts!"

"Ise gwine ter gorough-an-tumble," asserted Pomp.

"Begob, it's cowl'd mate we'll soon be, I'm afeered."

"Ain't gwine ter gib up s'long's dar am no way out ob it, chile."

"Then fetch on ther spalpeens, an' see me knock thim out."

Frascuolo opened the door of the stone cage, and darted away.

Hardly had he gone when two huge, cat-like forms sprang out through the cage door and landed in the arena not far from where Barney and Pomp were standing.

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted the bandits, clapping their hands and pounding on the floor with their weapons as the two magnificent but desperate beasts leaped into view with startling grace and a show of ferocity that was simply terrible.

The pumas were enormous animals of their species, and besides being very handsome, they were half starved.

"Begorra, an' it's ther illigant crathers they bes," said Barney, as he noted that they were fully five feet in length, of a reddish brown color, and were in a starving condition. "An' shure it's pet cats I'd loike ter be afther makin' av thim, if it wasn't that they loikes ter drink blood, as much as a Clonakilty man loves ter sup whisky!"

"Barney, I'se awful sick; take me outer dis, honey," groaned Pomp.

He did not know that the pumas were timid about attacking men.

Both the Irishman and the darky retreated as far from the American lions as possible, and the Mexicans eyed the famished and ravenous creatures gloatingly, for they expected to see them spring on the two helpless men, and devour them on the spot.

Our two friends were in a most horrible position, but the keen witted Barney thought of a daring plan whereby they might escape, and as the two snarling beasts stood glaring balefully at them, and lashing their flanks with their tails, he leaned over, and whispered to Pomp.

Several suspenseful moments passed.

The two cougars stood apart snarling at each other now, and Barney and his friend began to edge their way around the arena.

One of the animals seemed to be more dangerous than the other, for it made a sudden spring for Barney.

With the greatest agility the Irishman ducked his head, and the beast flew over it, and landed on top of its companion!

Then a vast surprise awaited the eager Mexicans.

A partition had been separating the pumas in their den, both opened by the same door, and the ugly beasts now preferred fighting each other sooner than attack the men.

The moment the one that leaped landed on the other, a frightful battle between them began; and Barney and Pomp taking advantage of the surprise of the Mexicans, dashed across the arena.

And into the pumas den they sprang, as the door was but a few feet above the floor, and slamming it shut, they found themselves safe.

A yell of rage pealed from the Mexicans upon seeing that their design upon the lives of the two captives was thus thwarted, but they knew that the two were as securely in their power yet as if locked in a safe.

The awful combat between the two animals became worse every moment, arresting their attention, and after the first transports of rage were over, they resumed their seats and keenly watched the fight with all the enjoyment their race have for a bull-fight.

Barney and Pomp found themselves in a stone box ten feet square and high, the apertures in front giving them a clear view of the battle of the beasts, which by that time had reached its height.

The smallest of the two animals had the other one by the throat with its fangs, and as they both arose on their hindquarters, pawing and

tearing and snarling at each other, the sight thrilled the spectators through.

It was appalling.

Then down they fell and over and over they rolled, throwing up the dust in clouds, tearing like maddened fiends at each other until their glossy hides were rent with fatal wounds and were bathed in the crimson fluid that soon would ebb away their lives.

A terrific uproar filled the cellar.

The Mexican bandits became worked up to a high pitch of excitement.

They began to bet with each other, yelled frantically at their favorites, applauding any extraordinary wound it gave its antagonist, and swore and hissed at its adversary when it scored a good point.

Soon the place was in an uproar.

One of the pumas, torn to pieces, fell over dead.

Mad at the loss of money which he had bet on it, Frascuelo with brutal, cowardly instincts, wrathfully raised his revolver and fired a shot at the half dead victor, which laid it out a corpse.

Those of the bandits who won money laughed, as they took their stakes and loudly complimented the prowess of their favorite, while the ones who lost scowled, growled and hurled the bitterest in invectives against the dead conqueror.

The dreadful scene of horror was over, but the natural brutality of the dissolute bandits was not yet appeased, for they arose in a body and began to clamor for the sacrifice of Barney and Pomp's lives.

"Let us give them knives and force them to fight each other to death," one suggested.

"Let us stand in file and shoot off their limbs until they perish," said another.

"Let us burn them at the stake or dissect them while living," the third planned.

To all of which diabolical schemes Frascuelo replied authoritatively:

"No, senors. I will go myself, drag them from the pumas' den, and torture them until they confess a means by which we can get the upper hand of the rest of their party. It is evident that they have returned to the island, to prey upon the vast treasure which we have seen, and have sworn to get for ourselves."

"That is a far better plan," assented several of the men.

The bandit chief clutched his revolver in his hand, and dropped down into the gory arena, eagerly watched by his friends.

They all prepared their rifles for use, in case Barney or Pomp should get the best of Frascuelo, and saw him stride across the ring.

When he reached the huge stone box he paused.

Seizing the door, he flung it open.

"Come out!" he exclaimed, sternly.

No reply was vouchsafed.

"Obey me, or I will riddle you with bullets!" yelled Frascuelo, angrily.

Still no reply.

The bandit chief uttered an expletive.

Thrusting his revolver in through the open door, he began to blaze away until every chamber was emptied.

Then he peered into the den.

A cry escaped him an instant later, and clapping his hand to his forehead, he reeled back as pale as death and trembling like an aspen from some strong emotion that assailed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WHITE ANTS.

THE half dozen giants who struck Frank senseless with a cudgel amid the rocks were the remnants of Isaac's tribe, and when they carried the inventor up the mountain, it was done to kill him.

There did not seem much chance of Frank's friends coming to his rescue, for as he left them with the expressed intention of finding a hiding-place for the ten huge earthen jars, filled with diamonds taken from the ruined city, they would not expect him back for some length of time.

In that case, it was unlikely that they would go in search of him, for he would not, by his long absence, cause any uneasiness, unless it was exceedingly protracted.

Consequently the giants seemed to have him at their mercy.

They were heading for a dry, sandy spot in a glen amid some trees that grew along the base of a lofty precipice.

When they reached the place, they advanced with great caution.

It was a queer-looking spot.

There were numberless rows of conical hills,

from four or five feet high to thirty, built of the fine sand in the shape of huge cigars, rising up from the ground all over the place, and it was toward the largest of them that the giants carried Frank.

The mode of death they chose for him was simply diabolical.

The queer-looking mounds were ant-hills.

At least the huge termites that infested them are called white ants.

The white, Jewish-looking savages paused at the highest hill, and held a whispered conversation. Then one of their number went to one of the smaller hills, and drove four pieces of wood in the ground around it.

Frank was just recovering his senses as they fastened his wrists with pieces of tough, fibrous vine of some sugary plant.

A piece was tied to each of his ankles, and then they flung him down upon his back on the huge ant-hill, crushing it, and hastily tied each of his wrists to a stake, one one side of the hill, and each of his ankles to the stakes on the other side.

Then the savages beat a hasty retreat, going back toward the coach to devise a means of killing its inmates.

Hardly had they vanished, when the disturbed ants came out in vast multitudes from the village of hills, and attracted by the sweet odor of the sugary vines, of which they are passionately fond, they came by thousands from all directions, swarming all over Frank.

They are rapacious, pugnacious and unconquerable creatures, often attacking birds, reptiles, beasts and men for food, their sharp mandibles inflicting stinging bites, and their power to quickly pick a carcass clean to the skeleton being remarkably great.

It was the intention of the savages to have these creatures devour Frank alive.

The stinging pains they inflicted upon him aided materially in bringing him to his senses, and when he came to a realization of his position, he found himself so covered with the white ants that he could scarcely open his eyes.

Their numbers were so great, in fact, that for hundreds of yards around he could see nothing but the moving mass of these creatures, looking like the surface of a rippling sea.

They were spread out in a white, surging carpet of animation, and he felt them gnawing at his clothes, nipping at his skin and biting rapaciously at his bonds.

"My doom is sealed," thought Frank despairingly. "They only attack sick or wounded animals that cannot help themselves as a rule, and when they find that I am lying powerless at their mercy, they will devour me. Oh, if I could only burst these bonds! Who did this?"

He had not seen who his captors were, and he struggled and tore at his lashings, the convulsions of his body dislodging the ants by thousands, crushing them to a pulp under him, but it was all of no avail.

As fast as he rid himself of some of the ants, myriads were ready to take their places, until at last he was forced to give up in sheer despair.

Moreover a most peculiar odor began to arise from the tiny creatures as soon as he began to trouble them.

It came from a volatile liquid they ejected, called formic acid, the pungent smell of which can soon kill small animals, while the effect on Frank was almost intolerable, adding greatly to his suffering.

He remained quiet awhile.

Then they began to bite and sting him again.

The feeling of those creeping objects all over him was maddening.

He could not keep still, and his violent struggles began again.

Snap! suddenly went one of the lashings on his wrist.

One of the vines had been gnawed through by the ants!

Frank's weapons in his belt remained intact yet, and grasping his knife, he tore it out, severed the vine holding his other wrist, and then sitting up, he cut the ones on his ankles.

Quickly bounding to his feet, he shook and brushed as many of the termites from his face and body as he could and rushed away to put as much space between the ants and himself as possible.

He came to a pool of water in a hollow and sprang in.

Remaining under the water, with just his face above the surface, until he got the white ants off, he emerged free of the pests, but drenched.

His clothing was in tatters.

The ants had eaten thousands of holes through the cloth.

But he had more clothing in the coach, and had saved his life, which was all he cared about.

Paying but little heed to the pains from the bites he received and fearing that the attack on himself by the savages would extend to his friends on the coach, Frank gave up all idea of finding a hiding-place for the diamonds in the ten stone jars for the present.

"I'll hasten back to the Whirlwind," he muttered, "and see if everything is all right there."

He glanced keenly around on the ground when he started, saw no tracks to betray who his persecutors were, but observed that his rifle was missing, although nothing else was gone.

"Had it been Frascuelo," thought Frank, "he would have disarmed me, after striking that cowardly blow, so it must have been a savage—perhaps Isaac, for these diamond-islanders are not thieves!"

The idea that the followers of either of the men he mentioned had escaped death from the eruption of the volcano never entered his mind, and he soon reached the ruined city.

The coach stood there, but not a soul was in it, or near it.

Moreover, the ten stone jars filled with diamonds were gone too.

"They have very likely found a place in which to hide the diamonds during my absence," thought Frank, "and have taken the jars away to get them out of sight. I'll wait in the coach for their return."

He entered the pilot house of the Whirlwind and sat down, when suddenly his glance was attracted by a piece of white paper lying on the floor, with some writing in pencil on it.

Stooping over, and picking it up, he read:

"FRANK.—Six savages of Isaac's band have attacked us and captured Fitzgerald and Panchita. I have retreated in here. Barney and Pomp are away. They are coming for me now, and—"

That was all.

The writing was in Dr. Vaneyke's hand, and he was interrupted no doubt before he could inscribe any more.

"It must have been these fellows who attacked me!" muttered Frank, jumping to his feet, "and they have doubtless taken away the treasure. But where have they gone?"

It was an easy matter to ascertain, for the volcanic dust left a plain trail, and when Frank got out of the coach, he found it, and followed it around to the northern side of the island.

There were no bridges on that side, and as they could not cross the thick, oozy mud carpeting the bed of the evaporated lake, he felt confident that his friends and their enemies were yet on the island, and consequently open to rescue.

Having settled this in his mind, Frank hastened back to the coach, and started it off on the trail.

Within five minutes he turned a spur of the mountain, and a sudden thrill passed over him when he beheld a glaring lurid light ahead dart up to the sky.

It came from a forest fire and made him feel suspicious.

The coach went up on an elevation, high above the fire, and, glancing down, he saw that a small cluster of dead trees had been ignited, and were burning like tinder.

In a glen amid the trees he saw the doctor, the ranchman and the girl, bound to three of the tree trunks, surrounded by the fire.

Within a few minutes their doom would be sealed.

"I must save them!" gasped the horrified Frank, "but to do it I will have to drive the coach in the midst of that fearful chaldron of flame, and perhaps sacrifice my own life!"

He saw a mass of out-cropping rocks, and a small stone house in amid the timber, in back of the three captives, which he would have to avoid, in the rush of the coach down the hill.

Firmly grasping the wheel, and having his bearings all taken, he started the Whirlwind at breakneck speed.

Away shot the coach like a streak of lightning!

The road was fearfully rough—much worse, in fact, than Frank imagined it was; and as the flying Whirlwind went along the rocks and hollows bounced and swayed it like a rubber ball.

Down, down, down it shot, straight for the awful blaze, and Frank glanced at the shutters, and saw that they were all closed and would protect the glass and keep out the heat.

On, on, on went the terrific race for the lives

of the three unfortunates, and Frank saw the six giants speeding away from the fire, going up the mountain, ever and anon glancing at the thundering coach, from the electric machinery of which lurid blue flashes of light were streaming and darting on the twilight.

The coach came within a dozen yards of the burning trees, and Frank braced himself and held his breath.

Then there came a sudden shock. Its violence hurled Frank down. One of the front wheels had struck against a rock.

It went up on it, tilting the coach. Then the driving-wheel struck. And over went the coach on its side with a bang.

Frank, bewildered, was flung about, and heard the wheels hum and roar, as they buzzed around in the air, for the scythes projecting from the hubs held the wheels up from the ground.

The coach was upset for the first time!

A thrill of dismay shot through Frank, and he shut off the power.

He scrambled out through a window and reached the ground.

"She is a wreck! My friends will perish!" he cried, bitterly.

He dared not venture in the fire without the coach, and it was now beyond his use, for he could not right it at once, unaided.

But he left it lying on its side, and ran around the cluster of blazing trees, bushes and shrubs, hoping to find a means of getting into the glen to aid his friends.

There was not a single opening. The entire belt of timber was in a roaring mass of flames.

Frank broke out into a cold, clammy perspiration.

He was helpless to aid them.

"By this time they must be smothered by the smoke, strangled by the suffocating heat, or utterly roasted to a crisp!" he gasped, as, pale with horror, he circled around and around the fire.

What to do to aid his friends Frank did not know.

It was impossible to dash in amid the flames without killing himself, he saw at a glance, and at last he gave up all hope and sadly returned to the capsized coach, convinced that his friends had perished in the flames.

An examination of the Whirlwind showed him that she rested upon the scythes and the edge of the roof.

Stanchly built as she was, and falling in the manner she did, although the roof must have been strained, he was amazed and delighted to see that she was uninjured, save for a few broken glasses.

There was no way in which he could right her unaided, lightly built as she was, unless he could rig a tackle from one of the trees, and this he could not do yet, on account of the fire.

So he waited until the blaze was over.

The fire burnt itself out in due course, and the gloom of night fell with a starry sky, and Frank aroused himself.

He had plenty of rope and blocks in the coach, and having found a charred tree trunk that would stand the strain, he put up his tackle, and making a triple purchase to lessen the weight, he got the noosed end of the rope around the car.

Then he gradually hauled the roof up, and as all the weight was on the bottom of the coach when she arrived at the angle of balance, the weight of the wheels threw her over, and she stood righted.

Frank removed the tackle, examined the coach again, and having placed everything in order, he was about to start off in the midst of the burnt out timber, when he heard a gun shot.

It sounded close by, and he peered out the window of the coach.

As he did so he beheld a number of shadowy figures flitting in amid the charred tree trunks, and saw several more shots fired.

"I cannot look for the remains of my friends now," muttered Frank, grimly. "There is hot work going on there, and I'll see what it means."

And starting the coach, it dashed in amid the burnt trees.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RESCUED FROM THE FLAMES.

THE strange emotion Frascuelo, the bandit chief, underwent after firing into the pumas' den to kill Barney and Pomp was caused by what seemed something supernatural.

In the gallery surrounding the arena, under the palace which Isaac had once occupied, the bandits were eagerly leaning over to see the Irishman and negro appear.

And in the middle of the ring lay the bodies of the two beasts who gave the outlaws such a ferocious exhibition of their savage fury, both dead.

The cause of Frascuelo's agitation was marvelous.

He and his men had seen Barney and Pomp enter the huge stone box while the pumas were fighting, and they were positive it had but one door and the few air apertures on each side of it.

Yet now the den was empty. Barney and Pomp were gone.

They had vanished as mysteriously as shadows.

It did not seem possible they could melt, yet there was not a trace to be seen of any means by which they got away.

All the pistol-shots Frascuelo fired into the den were useless.

He turned to his companions and beckoned to them.

"Come down here!" he shouted.

"*Carral!* Have you killed them?" demanded one of the men.

"No. Come down here, I tell you!"

"Something is amiss. Come, friends, follow me."

And so saying, the outlaw dropped down into the arena, followed by his companions, and they approached Frascuelo.

He stood by the open door and pointed in the den.

"Look, and tell me if you can see the two men," said he.

The men crowded around to comply.

"Gone!" they chorused, in amazed tones.

"Gone!" echoed the bandit chief. "But where to?"

The men looked at each other in perplexity. They could not understand the puzzling mystery of the strange disappearance of their two captives, and superstitious ideas began to crop out of their minds at once.

Frascuelo sprang into the den.

"There must be an explanation of this!" said he decidedly.

"But what?" demanded one of the men.

"Nothing but a hidden outlet."

"Do you see one?"

"Not yet, but I will find it if there is one here."

Frascuelo closely examined the four walls, the roof and the floor.

He could not find anything but the joints of the flat stones of which the den was built, and they were filled with mortar.

Then he sounded every flagstone and listened for a hollow echo to designate an open space behind it, but the stones were too thick to transmit such a noise, and he finally desisted.

"*Carrambal!* It is no use!" he exclaimed impatiently, "yet I am positive, amigos, that there is a passage leading from this den, and the two men have discovered it and thus made their escape. It stands to reason that seven pistol shots could not blow them to pieces, nor has mortal man got the power to make himself invisible."

"Let the rest of us search," said one of the men.

"By all means. Come in. We ought not to let them escape, for as the rest of their friends must be near, they will no doubt warn them of our presence here, if they can get away, and that would put an end to my hope of taking them by surprise."

"You told us to-day of an object you had in view of trying to get their electric coach in your possession," said one of the men, as the rest crowded into the puma's den and eagerly began to examine the walls to find an outlet.

"Yes, and so I have," asserted Frascuelo. "I may as well explain it to you now as later on. Far down on the Isthmus of Panama there is the daughter of a rich planter whom I love and wish to gain for my wife."

"Bosh, senior, bosh! Why let your love intrigues interfere with our work?"

"Hold on, my friend, until you hear all. The beautiful senorita hates me, and once before repulsed me. But the romance of my life is not ended, and I have sworn to have her by foul means if not by fair. Then to abduct her is my plan, and her father being thrice a millionaire, will gladly pay a million pesos ransom for his only child, for he adores her to the verge of holy worship."

"Ha! that sounds much better. Proceed."

"The proud and haughty Don shall have her

back when he has paid us the amount we demand."

"And, then?"

"Nay, nay, before then."

"What?"

"She shall be my lawful wife."

"You would steal the maid, and return her to the parental roof a wife?"

"Exactly so, and thus we shall all consummate our desires."

"Bravo, Frascuelo, bravo!"

"Will you all go with me or not, now?"

"Ay, ay! Every one of us, since the object is so great."

"And fight for me, my friends, and carry out our plan?"

"To the death!" came a chorus of eagerly assenting voices. Frascuelo smiled sardonically.

"I am satisfied!" he exclaimed. "You all have brave hearts."

"But dull eyes, senor."

"No, no! I deny it. Why do you say so?"

"Because we fail to find the means of your two captives' escape."

"Then let the matter rest, and we will lose no time to anticipate them, for by finding their friends before they are warned, who knows but what we may take them by surprise and not only capture them, but gain possession of their coach by means of which we can easily cover the hundreds of railway travel we might otherwise have to undergo on horseback."

They left the pumas' den, jumped into the arena, and by climbing upon the shoulders of the tallest guerrilla, they got up in the auditorium, and pulled the tall man up after them.

Then ascending the flight of stone stairs, and passing through the trap door, they came out amid the ruins of the city.

Close by they beheld the electric coach standing unguarded.

The savages had taken Vaneyke, Panchita, and Fitzgerald away prisoners a few moments previously, for Isaac's men had found them weaponless, and stunned them with their clubs.

A second glance showed the bandits the ten jars of diamonds, and a shout of joy pealed from their lips.

"The people are gone," cried Frascuelo, mad with a delirious joy at thus finding the vast treasure all ready for him to take away. "Before they come back, we must have these ten jars of diamonds hidden down in the amphitheater where we just came from. Then we will return to get the coach. Heaven be praised for this gift. Set to work now with a will, and, *por dios*, we will soon have everything our own way. To work! To work!"

And setting the rest an example, he seized upon one of the huge jars, and began to roll it over to the open trap door.

The others followed his example, and they soon had the vast treasure of the isle of diamonds hidden down in Isaac's palace cellar.

It was while they were all underground disposing of the jars that Frank came back, and went away with the coach.

The wrath of the bandits was intense when they found the Whirlwind gone, upon emerging again, and with the determination of stealing it they went up the mountain under Frascuelo's lead to find out in which direction it had gone.

In the meantime Barney and Pomp had found a door in the wall of the puma's den, quite by accident, for happening to press upon one of the stones, Pomp found that it turned on a pivot.

A large, dark aperture was seen in the back, and as the two crept into it, they found that a cross-bar of thick wood, with which the door was kept fastened, had fallen from the sockets.

The earthquake had very likely dislodged it, and they put it back in its place, and crouching on the floor near the door, they overheard all that passed between the bandits.

The place they were in was a passage that ran under the ground a tremendous distance, and was probably used to either offer a means for a man to feed the beasts, or else was utilized to make a way to put wild animals in the stone cage.

When the bandits started to leave the arena, both Barney and Pomp sighed deeply with a sense of utter relief they had not felt in some time.

"Bedad, it wor kilt I thought we wuz," the Irishman whispered in low tones; "but did iver ye see ther toime a Greaser could kill an Irishman, ye black son-av-a-gun?"

He gave Pomp a punch in the stomach that drew a grunt from the coon, and restored some of his flagging courage.

"Le' me git out ob dis!" said the old darky in

scared tones. "I d'wanter stan' up befo' no mo' tager-cats an' git shot at by dem yere outlaws when dar amnt no chance ob fendin' yo'-self."

"Folly me, ye coward!" said Barney. "Faith, it's somewhere this passage lades ter, an' that's betther'n goin' nowheres at all, at all."

He crept along the dark passage, followed by Pomp, and they presently emerged into a vast fissure made by some convulsion of nature, down through the top of which the light streamed.

There was a stone door in the wall at one side, but as they could not get it open, they pursued the fissure a great distance, and finally found that the opening of the top closed, and left them going along a dark passage again.

After awhile they were brought to a pause by running up against a wall, and Barney lit a match, and they found themselves in a square cellar containing a wooden flight of stairs.

"It's undher a house we must be," said Barney, snapping his fingers and dropping the match, which burnt them. "There's no way fer it now, me schwate rosebud, but to go up thim same."

"Yo' go fust," said Pomp, lagging behind.

"I will, but if it's an imp we'll mate above, shure it's yerself I'll git behoind, ye tarrier. Git a grip on me coat-tails now, an' I'll jerk yez black hoide up in the air as quick's ther hangman's a-goin' ter to do it fer yez, whin we gits back ter Readestown."

They went up the stairs and entered a small house, by means of a door, and found that it contained only one room.

There was a door at one side, and Barney flung it open.

A yell of horror pealed from his lips.

He sprang back, followed by a sheet of flame and a cloud of smoke.

"Begorra, we're in ther middle av blazes!" he yelled.

"De house am on fire!" gurgled Pomp.

"Divil a bit, but ther house is in ther middle av a foire."

"Help, help!"

The wild supplication came from out in the flames.

"De doctah's voice!" roared Pomp.

"Save us! Oh, for God's sake, save us!"

It was another agonized voice.

"An' that, bedad, is Fitzgerald," said Barney.

Together they rushed out the door, and just ahead of them they saw the three bound captives in danger of being roasted to death.

Out flashed their knives, and blinded, burnt and choking, they rushed up to the half-fainting captives, cut them free, and fairly dragged them into the stone house, the door of which they slammed shut.

They were not a moment too soon.

The unfortunates were hastily revived, and as the heat from the burning timber became so great about the house, they retreated down into the cellar, where they exchanged stories.

Night had fallen before they found that the fire was out, and that they could venture away from the stone house.

"Let us return to where we left the coach, for Frank must have come back, and will be exposed to great danger from the bandits and the savages," said the doctor. "If Frascuelo's men have captured the coach, and found the diamonds, we will be in a terrible plight."

They stepped out amid the charred trees, when to their surprise they found themselves confronted by Frascuelo and his men, who had been attracted to the spot from the mountain by the fire.

In an instant shots were exchanged between both parties, and they sought the shelter of the projecting tree trunks from where they blazed away at each other upon every opportunity.

A bullet from the doctor's pistol wounded Frascuelo on the head, and the infuriated bandit chief rushed out from his covert in defiance of the danger to his life, and made for Vaneyke.

He was just about to shoot the doctor down, when with a rush and a roar the electric coach came flying into the burnt woods, the electric lights showing Frank standing at the wheel.

Frascuelo and his men were startled.

But recovering himself, and not to be balked, the bandit chief again raised his revolver to fire, just as the coach paused.

The doctor's life was not worth anything at that moment, for only a few yards separated him from Frascuelo.

But just as the Mexican pulled the trigger, Frank was out of the coach, having seen the bandit's action, and sprang between the doctor and his cruel enemy.

A sharp, spiteful crack pealed out from the weapon, and as Frank's body was thus interposed between the Mexican and the doctor, the bullet hit him.

He uttered a stifled cry and reeled back.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

THE bullet from Frascuelo's large-caliber revolver almost knocked Frank down, and the Mexican uttered a shout of triumph, thinking that he killed him.

By his heroic act Frank saved Vaneyke's life, for the Mexican could not have missed the doctor at such short range as he stood from him.

But fatal as the shot seemed to be, Frank was uninjured.

He had on his shirt of mail.

The bandit's bullet shocked him, but could not penetrate the woven steel wire of which the armor was composed.

Before Frascuelo recovered from his astonishment to see Frank standing uninjured from a shot at not three paces distance, our hero fired a ball at the Mexican that took off his hat.

It was followed by another that went through the big rascal's side, and elicited a howl of agony from him.

"Fire on them!" shouted Frank, as the bandit chief ran away. "Give them hot shot, and get on board the coach."

A volley from the doctor, Fitzgerald, Barney, and Pomp followed, and Panchita made a dash for the coach, when down from the hills rushed the six men of giant stature who had tried to have Frank devoured alive on the white ant hill.

Armed with spears, bows and arrows, the savages, to avenge the destruction of their once beautiful city, fired a volley at both Frank's and Frascuelo's party, and one of them caught the girl and dashed in amid the rocks with her.

He knew that Isaac, his chieftain, was in love with the girl, and would be thankful to have her in his power.

Both the bandit's and Frank's party, now attacked by a common enemy, had to join forces, after a fashion, to repel the savages.

It made them both mad to have to do it, but there was no other recourse, for if they didn't the giants would kill them all.

So, foes as they were, they mingled together and fired shot after shot after the giants, who sheltered themselves behind the rocks, and then sent their spears and arrows whistling down from their elevation at the Mexicans and coaching party.

The moment Fitzgerald saw the girl of his choice carried away, he dashed after the giant who held her, resolved to save her or die attempting the feat.

The abductor left his friends and fled from the island with the girl, Fitzgerald in hot pursuit, his dogged English blood boiling; and yet he was afraid to fire at the giant for fear of hitting the girl, with whose body the man protected his own.

It was unfortunate that Fitzgerald left Frank's party, as his absence weakened it in case they had to turn on the Mexicans when the siege with the giants was ended.

Shower after shower of hissing arrows and whistling spears came flying from amid the rocks, but as the besieged were sheltered behind the tree trunks, they suffered nothing from the savages.

A few moments later the firing ceased.

Not a sound was heard coming from behind the rocks.

"Look out for treachery, Barney!" exclaimed Frank to his nearest companion. "They have not stopped for nothing."

"Be jabers, I think I see 'em runnin' away," returned Shea.

He was peering out and up the mountain.

There were a number of flitting shadows in range of his vision, and as Frank followed the direction of his glance he muttered aloud:

"I see through their plan, by Jove."

"But it's not ther laist taste that I do," said Barney in perplexity.

"They were simply after Panchita for Isaac."

"Howly beans!"

"And were fighting to cover their companion's retreat with her!"

"Gimme an ax till I folly thim!"

"Now look out for Frascuelo and his men."

"Whoop, docthor dear, an' you Pomp, me own twin brother!"

"Go for the coach!" shouted Frank.

He glanced around, but saw no signs of Frascuelo or his men.

"De greasers am all gwine!" exclaimed Pomp.

"Have any of you seen where they disappeared to?" asked Frank.

Nobody answered.

They were all mystified.

Hurrying over to the coach, they entered by the back door.

But only to find Frascuelo and his men all crowded in there, and each one with a pistol in his hand aimed at their heads!

They were caught in a trap.

"Hands up!" ordered Frascuelo, sternly.

They had to obey.

"Drop your weapons."

Again they complied.

"Resist," said the grim Mexican, "an' I killa you all!"

They saw that he meant it.

The Mexican stripped them of their weapons.

"Bind them hand and foot," he said in Spanish to his men.

Our four friends felt very glum when they found themselves lying upon the floor, bound hand and foot, at the mercy of a cruel, bloodless enemy, who was thirsting for their lives, and the electric coach in his power, to do with it as he pleased.

They bitterly reproached themselves for not attributing the mysterious disappearance of the Mexicans to their entrance in the coach.

However, it was then too late to give away to regrets.

"Why don't you kill us, as you are so bitter for all we have done to you?" asked Frank tauntingly of the robber chief in order to draw him out. "We don't want to live in this condition."

"That shall come in de good time," quietly replied the dark-faced fellow, pulling at his flowing black mustache, as he fixed a keen and penetrating glance upon the inventor. "But for de present I keepa you all dat you suita my purpose, *carramba!*"

"Ah—you wan't to make use of us, eh?"

"I maka you drive dis coach for me down to de Isthmus."

"What for?"

"Dere is wan beautiful senorita dat I must take from home for de ransom."

"Ah And then?"

"I marry de lady myself. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But suppose I refuse. What then?"

"See de knife in my belt? I take it out, I cut your friend's head off."

"Fiend! Beast!"

"You do try to foil me again, I cut off de head of anoder wan too."

"And you would murder each one until I obey?"

"Si, senor! Refuse for de last, den you go de same way!"

"Heavens, what a foul wretch!"

Frascuelo grinned and chuckled a moment, then he growled:

"You will do what I say or not?"

"Under compulsion—yes."

"Bueno! Now I tell to you wan ting."

"Go on; I am listening."

"I have de ten jars of jewels, an' we hide dem!"

"Ah! Then they must yet be on this island," thought Frank.

"When we come back I get dem," proceeded the bandit chief, "an' I put dem on dis coach, go to Mexico, an' sell dem."

"So we are out of it, eh?"

"Alla de time, senor. Now remember—remember."

He shook his knife at Frank and turned to his companions. In Spanish he addressed them with:

"Now, boys, there must be the best in the land to eat and drink on this curious machine. Find the food and wine, and it's a merry feast and revelry we will have to-night after our fatigue, and to-morrow we will start on our long journey."

Frascuelo's men needed no second bidding, but scattered all over the coach, and it made Frank writhe to see them rummage into everything, and Pomp fairly groaned to observe his larder ransacked of the choice edibles he had prepared.

Within a few minutes the table was spread with the choicest food, all the best drinkables, and the land-pirates feasted and made merry until late in the morning, leaving our friends lying bound upon the floor.

"It is evident that they have stolen the diamonds and hidden them, as Frascuelo boasted," whispered Frank to the doctor. "We must find out where they are. Besides that, it seems that they are going on a long journey, and as they want us to manage the coach for them,

we will have to go along, whether we want to or not."

"It is just as well," assented Vaneyke. "You see, it will be hard for us to find out where they put the treasure unless we are with them."

"My opinion is that the jars are amid the ruins of the White City."

"Why do you think they are not somewhere else?"

"Simply because they are too heavy to take any distance without help."

"That seems to be a sensible theory."

"Now we must plan a means to get the best of them."

"Have you anything to suggest?"

"Yes. It must appear to occupy four of us to run the coach a long way."

"Ah! It is your scheme to have us all at liberty."

"By that means we would stand an easier chance to escape."

"Then you arrange it to suit yourself with the outlaws."

"Leave that to me; all that the rest of you must do is to assent."

"Careful, Frank, careful! Frascuelo is watching us."

The doctor's timely warning put Frank upon his guard, for he could not see the bandits, owing to his back being turned toward them.

Frascuelo came in from the next compartment and glared at them.

"No conspiring, senors," warned he, with an ugly scowl.

"Oh," carelessly said Frank, "we were just planning to get the best of you."

"Candid," grumbled the outlaw. "But I believe you, senor."

"Are we to remain bound captives all the time?"

"Decidedly," ascended Frascuelo. "Do you taka me for de fool?"

"Yes, I do. And I am glad you like this spot."

"Why?" growled Frascuelo sharply.

"Because you won't be able to move out of it, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"We are all liberated to work the coach for you."

"It shall be done," quietly replied Frascuelo, a meaning look sweeping over his coarse features, and after posting a guard, the bandits turned into the berths, and left our friends the hard floor to sleep on.

It was late the next day before they were all up and had their breakfast, and then Frascuelo whispered something to one of his men.

The fellow nodded, and went out.

"I am going to giva you all de liberty now," said the bandit.

"Are you?" dryly questioned Frank, who detected a hidden meaning in the sinister grin on his enemy's face. "That is good news."

"You not do need somebody to help you work de coach?"

"It needs four of us to do it."

"But how you did bring it here alla lone?"

"Oh," quickly said Frank, "that was because everything was in readiness. It takes one man to steer, another to operate the levers and keep a lookout, one man to lubricate, and another to watch the dynamo and machinery on a long trip. Two men could manage on a short journey. Now, how are you going to fix it?"

"You an' de old man steer, eh?"

"Generally. My other two friends usually remain in the coach."

"Den dat is de way we now will do it."

Just then the man whom he sent out returned.

In his hands he carried some heavy shackles of pure gold which he had found in the cellar under Isaac's fallen palace.

Without saying a word, he manacled Frank and the doctor together by their wrists and ankles, a short stout gold chain of curious workmanship linking them within two feet of each other.

Barney and Pomp were served in the same manner.

One key locked the antique padlocks, and when they were thus secured, Frascuelo took the key and severed their first bonds.

"You are free!" he exclaimed. "Arise an' go to your posts."

The four prisoners got on their feet gladly enough, as they were cramped by their fastenings.

One could not walk without taking the other with him.

They might just as well have been in prison as to be fastened that way, and their hopes of freedom rapidly diminished.

Frank and the doctor entered the pilot-house and Barney and Pomp remained where they were.

Frascuelo followed the inventor.

"Start de coach!" he exclaimed. "We go southward. If you play de treachery I kill you both lika de rats!"

He tapped the butt of his pistol meaningly, and Frank grasped the wheel, started the coach and they left the island.

Far to the southward they traveled, our friends wondering what had befallen Panchita in the hands of the giant, with Fitzgerald pursuing them, and by nightfall they went out on a rolling plain.

For several hours the coach thus went along, Frascuelo dozing on the settee in back of the two prisoners.

Then Frank suddenly descried the dark shadow of a growth of timber, called an "island" in the prairies.

Amid the trees he saw the twinkle of campfires, and presently he turned on the searchlight, the brilliant shaft darting upon the trees.

By its light he saw that it was an encampment of cavalry.

He glanced at Frascuelo, but the bandit was yet dozing, and then quietly steered toward the camp, the wild hope arising in his bosom of getting help.

The doctor saw it, too, and could scarcely suppress his excitement.

On rushed the coach, Frank increasing speed every moment.

But a tap on the back caused him to glance around.

Frascuelo stood behind him, pale and furious, with a revolver pointed at his head!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE KEG OF POWDER.

"TURN aroun' de coach, or you are wan dead man!" growled the Mexican, a dangerous glitter in his jet black eyes, as he saw what Frank intended to do. "Quick—turn, or I fire!"

"Foiled!" exclaimed Frank, bitterly.

The doctor nudged him encouragingly, and quietly twisted the screw of a binding post, severing the electric connection so that with a broken circuit no power would operate the driving wheels.

The Whirlwind began to slacken speed.

Frank realized at once what the astute doctor had done, and gave the wheel a turn that sent the coach off at an angle with the course she had been pursuing.

The gong-lever was in reach of the doctor's hand, and he turned it without permitting the bandit to see what he was doing.

Instantly a fearful ringing clatter pealed out. Yet it was scarcely necessary.

The glaring streak of electricity from the search light had alarmed the bivouacked soldiers, and they were heard to give bugle calls and drum rolls of alarm, that aroused the whole camp.

Moreover, the search light had shown them to be U. S. troops.

Frascuelo was wild.

"What is dat?" he savagely asked.

"A gong," demurely replied Frank.

"Stop it."

"I can't! I am not ringing it."

"Who is, den?"

"The electric current."

Frascuelo looked puzzled, as he could not understand it.

"Den put on more speed," said he.

"You saw how I did it, didn't you?" queried Frank.

"De lever No. 1 you turn aroun'—"

"Then see, to increase speed, the further it is turned the faster the machinery works and the coach goes. There it is turned."

The coach made a little spurt ahead, using up all the current there was left in the copper wires, then it stopped.

"Hello! What does this mean? Has the machinery broken down?" cried Frank, feigning the utmost amazement.

"Holy Virgin!" yelled Frascuelo frantically. "Start it! Make it go! De soldiers are coming running dis way!"

"I can't! There is something the matter."

"Move on! Move on, or I'll kill you!" roared Frascuelo wildly.

"I tell you again I can't do anything."

The bandit drew a bead on Frank threateningly.

"Dis is de las' chance!" he hissed.

"Oh, don't fire. It will go against you if

those soldiers enter the coach, and find my corpse on the floor," coolly said Frank. "You are right!" panted Frascuelo. "Yet, dey must not get in. I know how to fasten de doors and windows up!"

He shouted to his men to be upon their guard, and closing the doors and windows, he ordered two of his men to guard the prisoners with their drawn knives.

"If dey speak a word to betray us, cut deir wind pipes!" was his fierce order. "De soldiers' bullets cannot penetrate de coach, an' I try to parley with dem. Remember, you fellows, a word will cost your lives, an' I mean it too!"

Frank saw that he did.

the coach with their rifles, and with a determined air the officer yelled:

"If you don't explain the mystery of this electric motor, I'll drive you out with bullets and force you to do as I say!"

Frascuelo felt confident that they were not in any danger, and retained silence yet, as he did not know what reply to frame.

The officer waited fully five minutes.

Then he turned to his men.

"Fire!" he exclaimed.

A volley pealed out, and a dozen bullets struck the coach.

But they rebounded without doing it any damage, and when the lieutenant saw what lit-

face, showed him how much Frascuelo dreaded his situation.

His swarthy face was twitching, and he kept looking down at the floor, and uneasily lifting first one foot and then the other, as if he already felt the ignited keg of powder ready to burst under him at any unexpected spot and moment.

"Make de terms with me?" groaned the bandit desperately.

"Certainly," assented Frank. "You are all to leave the coach."

"No!" said Frascuelo, in decided tones.

"You will have to, or you will get blown to pieces."



With a rush the coach came upon a solitary tree that was standing athwart their path, and, although Barney tried to avoid it, the long, sharp ram over the cow-catcher struck it. There came a terrible shock.

And decided to keep still.

"Could the troops but see us chained up this way, they would suspect foul play, and demand a reason," he cogitated.

A man came and stood over the two with his drawn knife and another one served Pomp and Barney the same way, while outside they could hear the pounding of horses' hoofs and knew that the soldiers were fast approaching.

Frascuelo walked over to one of the windows.

Outside, he saw a number of soldiers mounted on horseback, circling around the coach, and then a man in the costume of a lieutenant advanced up to the cow-catcher, and shouted:

"Hulloa! Hulloa! Is there any one on board?"

Frascuelo did not answer.

"Open the door and come out!" shouted the officer.

The only sound that came from the coach was the steady sputtering hiss of the search light, while now and then a livid blue glare of light belched out from the wires at the sides and under the coach.

The lieutenant rode off a few yards, and called his men.

A file of soldiers at his command took aim at

the use it was to thus waste his cartridges, Frank heard him shout to one of his men:

"Bring me a keg of powder. I will plant it under this coach and blow it to pieces. There is something queer about this matter. If its inmates were honest men, they would not be afraid to answer and give an account of themselves, and since rifle bullets cannot open a way to the interior, I will employ a means that will. Hurry up, boys, hurry up!"

Frascuelo looked frightened.

"Holy Mary!" he panted, turning to Frank imploringly. "Start de coach!"

"I'd rather not," replied the inventor, calmly. "Since we four are doomed to certain death already, we may as well all go together."

"No, no! Ave Maria! I spare you; I swear it!"

"You're a liar. I wouldn't trust you!"

"Ah, good friend, dear friend. Think of the horrible fate awaiting us."

"Don't get too endearing, Frascuelo. It don't become your brutal nature."

Frank saw that he had his enemies at his mercy now, and the look of abject terror delineated upon every lineament of the bandit chief's

"I sooner die dis way dan have de soldiers arrest me."

"Very well," said Frank, serenely. "We will all get blown up together."

He sat down, as if thoroughly satisfied to await his fate in quietness, and the Mexican glared wildly out the window again.

"Dios mio!" he gasped, turning an agonized look upon Frank, "dey are fetching de keg now—hear it—hear it!"

Two voices below the coach began to speak.

"Plant it right in the middle," said one voice.

"There, that will do. Here is the five minute fuse. I'll fix it."

"Got a match?"

"Yes. There. I'll light it now."

"Look out. There's fifty pounds of powder there."

"Run! The fuse is lit!"

Frascuelo sank down in the settee, as the two men dashed away, completely overwhelmed with fear.

He now believed that Frank could or would not move the coach on, but did not see him connect the circuit again, and did not know that a simple turn of the lever would send the coach on.

Frank saw that the Mexican was weakening fast.

The rest came crowding into the doorway from the carriage.

They were frightened, for they heard all that transpired.

"We won't stay here to get blown to death!" cried one of them.

"No, no, no!" chorused the others.

"Only four minutes remain for us to live, gentlemen," calmly said Frank, arising, and withdrawing his watch. "You had all better kneel down and commend your souls to God, for the time is short."

diers in the woods, and upon observing what was going on, the troops dashed out at the savages, firing as they came, and a fierce fight began.

The outlaws in the coach crowded to the windows and peered out.

As soon as they saw what was going on, Frascuelo cried:

"We must leave the coach!"

"Yes—yes!" eagerly cried the others.

"Now is our best chance, while the soldiers are fighting."

"Then come! Let us go, or the keg will explode!"

A glaring mass of fire and smoke, a dense upheaval of dirt and stones, and a violent concussion signalized the explosion.

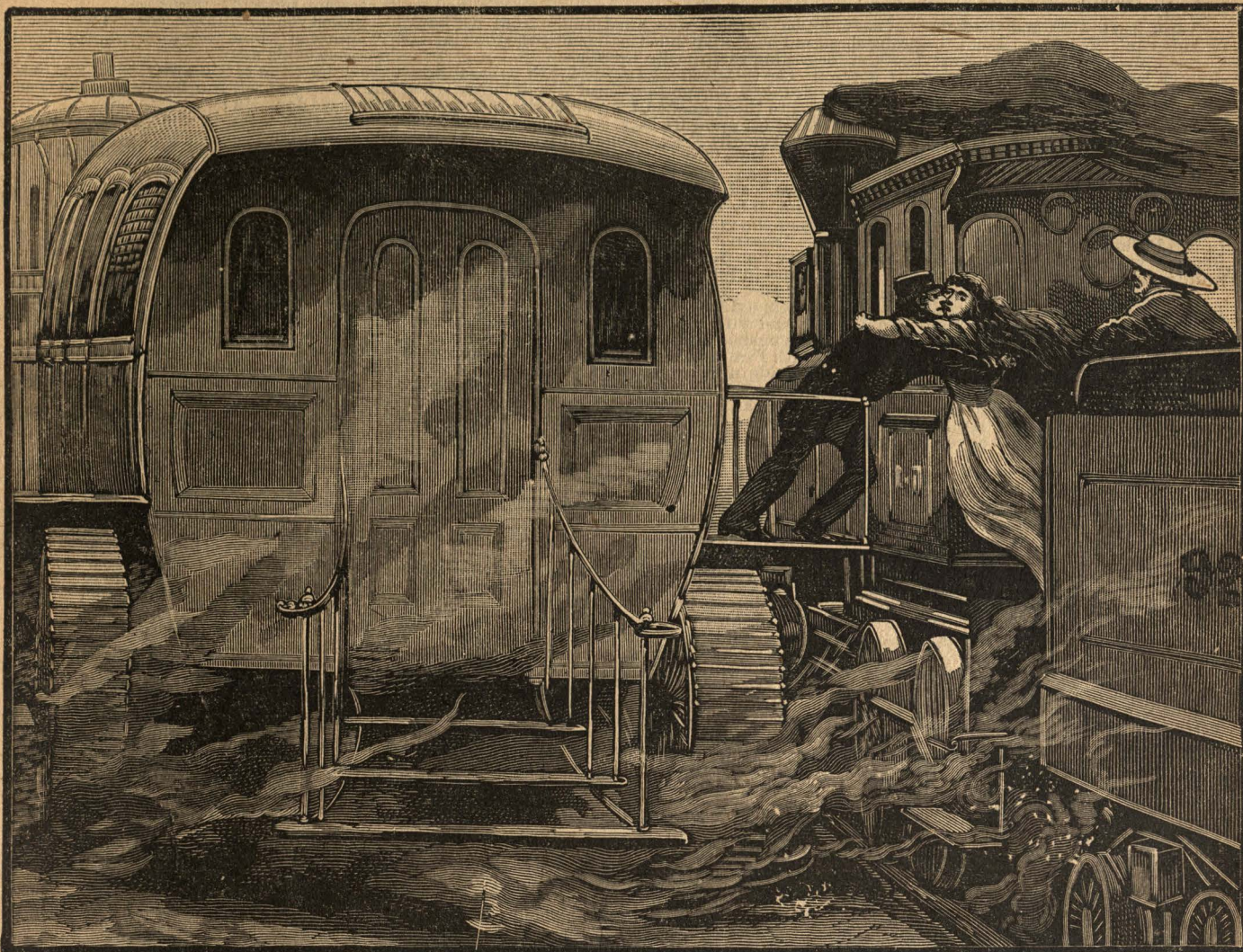
But the coach had rolled away from over it in good season.

It darted ahead, and although a few flying missiles struck it, they did no harm, and our friends found their spirits rising.

"It was a badly timed fuse," commented the doctor, dryly.

"Only four minutes it burned," said Frank, "and had we remained a few seconds longer, the object of the soldiers would have been accomplished, while we—"

He whistled, and snapped his fingers to end



As the doctor kept the coach running close to and even with the cab, Frank reached over the railing, and seizing hold of Panchita, he lifted her off the engine onto the Whirlwind.

"Four minutes?" muttered Frascuelo in horror.

Frank's friends did not say a word, for they knew what he was designing, and were satisfied to trust their lives to him.

Below the coach they heard a faint hissing sound.

It was the slow match burning down to the powder keg.

Frank glanced out the window, and saw that the soldiers had retreated in among the trees, and were looking that way.

Then another sight met his view that filled him with alarm.

Around the timberland swept a band of Indians, and in front of the mustang-mounted savages they drove a horse, upon the back of which Panchita and Fitzgerald were bound.

The Indians were flying from two giants, who were mounted on ponies, and coming on after them full tilt.

It needed but one glance to show Frank that the pursuers were Isaac and the man who had stolen Panchita from the woods where the doctor had been bound with the two prisoners.

Too late to retreat, the Indians saw the sol-

Frank glanced at his friends, enjoining them to remain behind.

Frascuelo shook his fist at Frank as he was going.

"Remain, you dog, and get blown to death!" he hissed, malevolently.

The outlaws dashed into the carriage, and Barney and Pomp came hastily into the pilot house.

"If we attempt to follow them off the coach," said Dr. Vaneyke, "they will fire upon us and settle our fate."

"There is no need," said Frank, with a laugh.

"The machinery is all right, and in a moment I will start the coach. We have got two minutes yet, before the fuse will reach the powder," he added, glancing at his watch. "Now brace up your nerves."

"Shure, an' they must be off be this time," nervously said Barney, listening, and hearing no sound, for they could not see, as the retreating bandits had closed the door after them.

Frank grasped the lever, turned it, caught hold of the wheel, and the coach glided ahead, when, with the roar of thunder, the keg of powder burst.

the sentence, pointing skyward with rather a significant gesture.

The others looked solemn and then laughed.

Pomp glanced out a window,

"De so'diers hab licked de Injuns!" he exclaimed.

"Ah! And our friends?" queried Frank, with a look of relief.

"Dey am off de mustang, sir, an' wif de ossifler atalkin'."

"Good! They will all be taken care of now."

"Isaac an' de yudder giant am gone."

"And the Indians?"

"Runnin' like blazes, sah."

"What are the soldiers doing?"

"Some ob dem am pursuin' de Injuns an' some is arter us."

"We will return to them presently. But where are the Mexicans?"

"Here!"

"Eh?"

"Here!" repeated the voice—Frascuelo's voice, as the door that communicated with the coach opened with a bang.

"Shure they didn't lave ther coach at all, at

all" cried Barney, "but ther blackguards have been in ther next room all ther toime."

What the Irishman said was true.

Frascuolo and his men were crowded in the doorway, the bandit chief wearing a diabolical smile upon his Sanatic face.

"Keep de coach going as she is, senior, or by de holy ghost I will take great pleasure in doing it myself over your dead body."

They were yet at the mercy of the miscreants. "The soldiery are close up to us," said one of the men, looking out.

"Den you go faster!" hissed Frascuelo, pressing the cold muzzle of his revolver at Frank's temple. "Faster, senior, faster, *car-ramba!*"

Frank had to obey, and the hearts of our four friends sank like lead as the coach sprang ahead and left the sound of pounding hoofs of the cavalry horses far in the rear, for all hope of rescue was now gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CATTLE THIEVES.

Two days after the events occurred which we have narrated in our last chapter, a wild, thrilling scene might have been observed, far down in the Isthmus of Panama, where the lonesome Sierras wound their majestic course through hundreds of endless miles.

A score of half-breed cowboys, mounted on firey mustangs, were circling about a heap of wild steers, yelling and firing their pistols into the midst of the beasts, and goading them over the country with fire-brands, toward the eastward, when a horseman appeared.

He was a fine-looking man of middle age, attired in the true Mexican costume, and his broad sombrero shaded a handsome face, the lower part of which was covered by a short gray beard.

A look of alarm and amazement overspread his face upon observing the cattle thieves' actions, for they were getting away with his own property, and it was evident that all were drunk and desperate.

He turned hastily in the saddle and motioned a young girl, who accompanied him, to go back amid the bushes from which they had just ridden, but the beautiful white mare upon which the girl was riding had been scared at the noise made by the rascally cowboys, and became unmanageable.

Indeed, it had fairly reached the side of the black stallion bestrode by the old gentleman, before the beautiful young girl, with consummate courage and skill, managed to get it once more under control.

Enraged at the despoilers of his stock, the old gentleman suddenly turned again to the girl, and cried:

"Go back to the plantation and summon assistance, Juanita, and I will endeavor to stop their marauding."

"Oh, papa, I fear for your life!" cried the frightened girl.

"Have no alarm," was the stern reply, "but go and do as I tell you!"

The girl could not quell her fears, but obeyed her father, and the moment the gentleman was left alone, he put spurs in the flanks of his stallion and dashed up to the cattle thieves.

"Stop!" he shouted, pulling a brace of revolvers from his sash, and covering the nearest cowboys. "Let that cattle be, or as true as there is a Heaven above us, I shall fire upon you!"

"Don Ramon de Castro!" yelled one of the ranchmen, reining in.

The name passed like wild fire from mouth to mouth, and one after the other the robbers reined in their mustangs.

The leader of the gang had a broncho that seemed filled with fire, and the beast sped away, and came up behind the Don with a rush, when out of the man's hand there whizzed a lasso, the folds of which dropped over the old gentleman's head.

As the noose fell over him, and the cowboy's broncho dashed on, the old man's arms were pinioned to his sides, and the weapons in his hands were rendered useless, while with a sudden jerk he was torn from his saddle.

Down upon the ground he was hurled with great violence, and a shout of derision pealed from the cowboys, as they saw the weapons going flying out of his hands.

The broncho scarcely had time to drag Don Ramon, when under the lasso dashed a huge steer, and the old man was jerked up on its back by the rope catching on its short horns.

He clung to the shaggy hair of the beast, and

the lariat snapped at the slip-knot, leaving him free.

The steer plunged away, in a direction opposite to that taken by the herd, and the old Mexican was carried with it, while with a scream of delight the cowboys came racing after it.

"A game!" yelled the leader, "the man who lassoes the Don shall get a doubloon! Carral, that was a good throw, Antonio, but by the saints, you have missed him!"

"It is my turn now," shouted another.

But a dozen noosed ropes whizzed through the air with a whistling sound, and several of them settled over the old Mexican's arms, when the mustangs were reigned in suddenly, and as the lines became taut, and the steer dashed on, Don Ramon was lifted bodily from its back, and held suspended in the air by the four lariats pulling in opposite directions.

The tortured man groaned with pain, and his drunken tormentors yelled with delight, when up to them dashed the milk-white mare, with Juanita upon its back, screaming like mad.

"The girl!" roared one of the men. "Lower him, boys!"

"Then fire the dry grass to drive on the herd," advised the leader, flinging away his broken lasso, "for the old ladronne may have sent the girl for aid, and—"

"Scatter! Scatter! Merciful God, what is this monster?" raved one of the men, digging spurs in his mount and dashing away.

"The demon himself, the arch demon!" screamed the leader.

And with a rush the Whirlwind came around the bushes and bore down upon the miscreants, with Frascuelo and a dozen of his men on the outside of it, armed with their rifles.

Frank and the doctor were yet in the pilot house, and sent the coach thundering up to the scared cattle thieves, who by this time had dropped their lassos and rode rapidly away.

Upon the front platform of the coach stood Frascuelo, and his men were upon the roof of the carriage.

"Fire upon them he shouted!" setting his men an example.

A volley of shots pealed out, wounding several of the thieves.

Don Ramon laid panting and half senseless on the ground, and as the coach went spinning off in pursuit of the cattle thieves, the girl Juanita sped up to the spot where her father laid, sprang from the saddle with extreme grace, and bent over the old gentleman, relieving him of the pressure of the lassos.

As a second volley of shots came from the Mexican bandits on the coach, a number of people who worked on Don Ramon's plantation, whom Juanita had summoned, appeared upon the scene, armed to fight the thieves away.

Away went the wild cowboys at break-neck speed, seeing that the raid was a failure, scared at the electric coach, and no purpose in view save a desire to get away with their lives.

Frank had seen at a distance what was transpiring, and at his suggestion the attack had been made, when it afterward pleased Frascuelo, for Juanita was the girl of whom he had come in search, to marry and hold for ransom.

"Our two days' travel has not been in vain," the bandit muttered, "and I shall complete the work these foragers set out to do."

Then he yelled to his friends to stop firing.

Going into the rear part of the coach as they came down, he apprised them that the Don and his daughter were the people they came after, and told them how they might steal the cattle.

The cowboys soon vanished in a cloud of dust in the distance, and Frank turned the coach around and headed back for Don Ramon.

"Two days of captivity!" said he to the doctor, who stood moodily looking out of the window, still chained to him. "I hope there will be a change soon, Vaneyke. It gets monotonous to stand here without rest or sleep two days and nights, at the point of the bandit's pistols, forced to keep the coach going."

"Perhaps these people, whose cattle we saved, may aid us."

"I hope so, doctor. See, we are almost up to them."

Frascuelo leaped to the ground as the electric coach came to a pause, and advanced, bowing, toward the Don and his daughter.

"Senior, I hope we arrived in time to save you from great injury?" the cunning bandit asked, in soft, polite tones of deep sympathy.

"You have saved my life, sir," replied Don Ramon, gratefully.

"I have but done my duty, senior."

"Allow me to thank you."

"Not at all. Send home your men. My friends will drive your cattle back to the pasture from whence the cowboys stole them, as it looks as if such was the difficulty."

"Yes, they were robbing me. But the trouble to your friends—"

"None whatever, I assure you. All are experienced ranchmen."

"And my men are not, being only simple plantation hands."

"Then favor me by dispersing them."

The old don did so reluctantly, and Frascuelo turned to several of his men who had followed him with the command:

"Take charge of these steers, boys. Where is the pasture, senior?"

"Behind yonder hillock covered with trees."

"Then you know the direction, boys?" said Frascuelo to his men.

They drove the cattle away, but it was to the nearest town to sell the beasts, and the suspicious old don said:

"But what strange contrivance is this in which you come?"

"An electric coach, senior. Would you like to see it?"

"Assuredly, for it is a marvelous machine."

"Then follow me with your daughter and your curiosity shall be gratified," said Frascuelo, smoothly, his heart throbbing though with unusual rapidity at the ease with which his plans worked.

He had worn a beard and a far different costume when he had been in this locality on another occasion, which accounted for Juanita and the don not recognizing him at once.

But as the father and daughter followed after him the girl leaned over to her parent, with a troubled look upon her face, and whispered in guarded tones:

"Do not trust this stranger, papa, for he has an evil face—a singularly evil face—that makes me shudder with dread."

"Bosh! It is pure nervousness, my dear child."

"Oh, I do not forget the obligation we are under for what he has just done, but I distrust him. There is something so repulsive and yet so familiar to me about him, but I cannot place the tones of the coarse voice, the wicked glance of his dark eye, the swaggering walk, or the lurking rascality in every gesture he makes."

"You are morbid, and do him an injustice, daughter."

"No, no, no. You will see—you will do well to heed me."

They reached the coach and went in.

"Start the coach in there—steer west!" shouted Frascuelo.

Frank heard him, and the guard in the pilot house, with the drawn knife, prodded him with the point, scowled, and hissed:

"Obey! You heard what Frascuelo said!"

"It is a plot to steal the girl!" exclaimed Frank obeying.

As the coach moved on, Frascuelo pointed at two chairs.

"Sit down!" said he gruffly, to the Don and his daughter, "and make yourself comfortable for a long journey up the mountains."

"Eh?" exclaimed Don Ramon, starting as he noticed the altered tone and manner of the hitherto polite thief.

"It is as I feared," murmured Juanita, with a frightened look.

A sneering, scornful smile curled the bandit's lip.

"I am Frascuelo!" he exclaimed drawing himself up.

Both father and daughter uttered ejaculations of terror upon hearing that dreaded and well-known name.

"Heaven protect us, we have been duped!" gasped the Don, flinging an arm around his daughter's waist and feeling of his sash for a weapon, but both pistols were lost when he was jerked from his stallion back by the lasso of the cattle thief.

"You are in a trap, senior!" hissed Frascuelo with a grin.

"Oh, you treacherous cur!" cried the girl with flashing eyes.

"My men will drive your cattle to market for me, instead of the fellows we drove off," proceeded Frascuelo. "You are defenseless, and cannot leap from this coach at our present rate of speed."

"Merciful heaven! What would you do to us?"

"You, Don Ramon, shall go free."

"But my child?" queried the agonized father anxiously.

"Once she scorned my love, and repulsed my honorable advances to marry her. Now it is my intention to hold her for ransom. It will

cost you one million posos to get her back, señor!"

"Abominable wretch!" shouted the exasperated man furiously.

"You know my disposition too well to imagine I am jesting," the bandit replied coolly. "Soon we will let you go. This is Friday afternoon. To-morrow night, at precisely twelve o'clock, I shall expect to see you in the vacant church of the Deserted City with the amount of ransom in bank-notes which I ask for, and you must come alone, and play no tricks on me."

"And were I to refuse?"

"Your daughter's mutilated remains would be sent to you."

"Oh, God help me!"

"If you comply, as soon as the money is in my hands, you shall have your daughter back."

"This is terrible—terrible!"

"Now that you know the conditions, choose—which shall it be?"

"Give me time to consider, I implore you!"

"No! Is your daughter's life worth less than money to you?"

"Good Heaven, no! But this crime—the humiliation. Oh, it is more than I can patiently bear. Accursed dog, I will kill you—I shall strangle the life out of you!"

And so saying, the desperate man sprang fiercely at the bandit, and caught him by the throat with both hands.

A hoarse cry of rage escaped Frascuelo, as he recoiled, while Juanita screamed, and fainted from excess of terror.

For an instant the two men struggled.

Then Frascuelo dealt the infuriated Don a blow on the head with the butt of his pistol that rendered him senseless.

The coach was stopped, they carried him out, and laid him on the ground to recover alone.

Then the coach went off toward the settlement, in order that the bandit might see what success his men had with the cattle.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DESERTED CITY.

WHEN the coach reached the town, Frascuelo found that his men had disposed of Don Ramon's cattle without much trouble, and the bandits divided the proceeds of the robbery, and prepared the Whirlwind to speed away.

Her destination now was the Deserted City mentioned by Frascuelo.

Frank was wild when he saw what the bandits had done, and ere the coach left the settlement, he turned to Dr. Vaneyke and whispered:

"Did you see what Barney did last night, doctor?"

"No. I have not the faintest idea of what you refer to, Frank?"

"While Frascuelo slept, he picked the bandit's pocket of the key."

"To unlock our shackles? Good enough."

"As soon as he gets a chance, he will pass it to us."

"Then we will soon be free!"

"I hope so. Both Barney and Pomp must be by this time."

"You must get them in here."

"Depend upon me—hush, here comes Frascuelo."

The bandit swaggered into the pilot-house clinking the golden centimes he got from the sale of the cattle, and with a sharp glance at his prisoners, he passed into the next compartment, where he had Juanita tied to a ring bolt in the wall, and shouted:

"Start the coach for the Deserted City, we are through here."

"I don't know the way," replied Frank, "and besides that, the coach won't work well on account of the dust in the bearings in here?"

"What do you want done now?" growled Frascuelo, poking his head in through the door, and glaring unamiably at Frank.

"Send in the negro and Irishman to clean the machinery."

"All right, but hurry up, as there is no telling how soon it may be discovered that the cattle we just sold does not belong to us, and that would lead to a serious complication, in which the chief things might be a tree branch and a noosed collar of hemp for us."

He sent Barney and Pomp in to Frank, and while he was talking to Juanita Frank set his friends to work on a needless job.

One of the men kept a glance fastened upon them, but Frank had no trouble to whisper for the shackle-key, and learn that his two friends already had their own bonds unlocked.

Just as Frank was despairing of getting the key without being detected, he heard Frascuelo

suddenly shout to the rest, as he glanced out a window:

"Here comes a troop of guards from the town."

"They have discovered that the cattle were stolen," said one of the men.

"Then we may expect a fight."

"Not if we run away."

"True, for a contest here is dangerous. They have guns in the garrison of the town that might be brought out, and a ball from them would very likely blow the coach to pieces."

While this diversion occurred, Frank got the key and unlocked his own and the doctor's bonds, for all the Mexicans were looking out the windows at the oncoming troops and left the prisoners unwatched.

Frascuelo ran into the pilot-house.

"Start the coach and go like the wind!" he exclaimed in Spanish.

"Which way?" queried Frank, hiding the fact of his bonds being unlocked.

"To the north-west, amid yonder hills."

"Is that where the Deserted City lies?"

"Yes. We must escape the approaching guardsmen."

"Ah! I see. Now suppose you manage the coach yourself."

"What! Carramba, are you going to revolt at this critical moment?"

"No. But I can't move the coach unless that wire is pulled out of the hole in the floor, and I cannot do it, as it is secured down in the compartment of machinery so tightly that a horse could scarcely do it."

"What is the matter with it?" demanded the Mexican.

"Can't you see that it is caught in one of the fly wheels, binding it so that it won't operate? Call in your men, if you want them to escape, to lend a hand."

Impatient and wild to get away, Frascuelo did so, and they all caught hold of the thick, tough wire, and began to haul on it with might and main.

It was the main wire that ran from the battery to the indicator in front of the wheel, and had been loosened by Frank a moment before.

The men tugged so hard at it that they nearly broke the insulator to which it was wired under the flooring, but it would not give.

Their strength seeming to be inadequate to the task, Frascuelo, in a perspiration and rage, called every one of the men to lend a hand.

But even when the whole crowd seized the wire and began to pull, it remained obstinate, and Frascuelo grumbled:

"Can't you get down under the floor and loosen it?"

"No," replied Frank. "Try again, quick, for the guards are close now."

Once more the bandits seized the wire.

When there came a terrific shock.

And fairly paralyzed them.

Frank had turned the current on, which he had cut off before.

The bandits began to yell.

And dance.

And swear.

Frank and his friends flung off their shackles and laughed loud and long at the antics of the Mexicans, for they could not let go of the live wire, and an awful current was sweeping like pins and needles through them, filling the rascals with anguish.

"Trapped!" exclaimed Frank exultingly.

"They are as safe on that wire as if bound and in a dungeon!" said Vaneyke.

"Dance, ye devils!" roared Barney gleefully.

"Shure, it plazes me entiroly ter see ther loikes av thim'greasers weltein' ther flure ter ther chune we had ter shuffle ter fer ther lasht two days, God bless thim!"

"Reg'lar cake-walk," grinned Pomp. "Step aroun' dar, yo' monkeys, an' ef yo' wanten, I'll git de ole banjo an' pick yo' a lubly straight jig."

"Mercy!" howled Frascuelo in English, as he writhed and twisted into all sorts of shapes like his companions. "Holy Virgin! let us go! You killa us! Oh, oh, oh! dis pain. Murder! murder! murder!"

His friends frantically pleaded to be released, every other word being interjected by an expletive, a wild howl, or a contortion and caper.

Frank was obdurate.

He had the villains at his mercy.

In the midst of the scene a guard of soldiers came up hastily, and as the captain paused outside, Frank heard him shout in Spanish:

"I demand of you to emerge, and submit to arrest!"

"For whom are you looking?" queried the inventor, looking out the door.

"Several men whom I saw enter that vehicle," replied the officer, sternly.

"The charge?"

"Cattle stealing, sir."

"Then you know where the steers came from?"

"Every one of them belong to Don Ramon de Castro."

"Good! I am his friend; his daughter is in here, and if you will enter the coach you will find the thieves all at my mercy, fastened to an electric wire from which they cannot get away unless I let them."

The officer looked suspicious, and was about to reply, when the bandit chief doubled the wire under his foot, struck it with his heel, and giving it a terrific jerk, it broke where he bent it.

Instantly the current was broken off from that part of the wire to which he was fastened, and he and his men no longer felt the electricity.

It occupied a moment for them to recover.

Then Frascuelo sprang to the lever board, and turned No. 1.

The Whirlwind shot ahead suddenly, and Frank looked around.

His dismay was intense to see what happened.

"Jump from the coach!" he shouted to his friends.

The soldiers outside scattered like sheep, but the captain was a determined man, and sprang in front of it with the intention of trying to get on board, when the long, sharp ram struck him.

The keen point pierced him like a dagger in the stomach, lifted him from the ground, and impaled as he was, the unfortunate wretch was carried along bodily, screaming with pain, and bleeding.

Faster and faster went the coach, and with a rush, a roar and a rattle it shot a mile ahead of where it had been standing ere the bandits turned their attention to Frank and his friends.

Then a terrific struggle ensued.

Outnumbered three to one our friends were overwhelmed.

As fast as they were overpowered, Frascuelo yelled in brutal tones:

"Hurl them from the coach! It may break their necks!"

One after the other the four adventurers were fired out of the swift going coach, and they fell at intervals apart, torn, stunned and shocked.

Luckily for the quartet none of their bones were broken.

Frank was the first to recover himself, and he saw the big Mexican driving the Whirlwind on over the plains with perfect ease.

The bandit had often watched how Frank operated the Whirlwind, and thus was able now to take hold and work it.

When Frank's friends recovered, the coach was out of sight, and not one of the soldiers was to be seen in the rear.

The four came together and held a consultation, amid a cluster of trees and bushes, and a decidedly glum feeling took possession of them.

"The coach gone, we can do absolutely nothing," despairingly said the doctor.

"Begob, an' it's meself that's near kilt," groaned Barney, rubbing his bruises.

"You forget that Frascuelo is to meet Don Ramon to-morrow night in the deserted city," said Frank, meaningly, "to get the ransom for Juanita. We must be on hand too. It is our only chance to recover the coach. Frascuelo knows how to run it now, and don't need us any longer."

"Spec yo' mistooken dar," interposed Pomp, grinning despite the misery he was in. "Yo' doan' reckon dat dis chile war down in de machine 'partment fo' nuffin, do yo', sah?"

"What have you been doing to the machinery, Pomp?" questioned Frank, with a start of surprise, as he glanced at the coon.

"Yo' done tole me dat de copper brushes on de dynamos wuz wore out."

"Yes, and asked you to put on new ones."

"But s'posen I lef de ole ones on, an' didn't do it, what'd happen?"

"The dynamo would not generate any electricity as soon as they are so worn that they cease to touch the fly-wheel and give off sparks."

"Den dat am gwine ter happen, I specs!"

"Lord love you, can it be possible?"

"P'raps yo' beliebe it, sah, when we find the Whirlwind stranded."

Here was a state of affairs that Frank did not expect, and he might have continued the conversation had not a priest suddenly emerged from amid the bushes where he had been gathering herbs to make medicine.

Frank questioned him about the Deserted

City, and elicited the information that it laid off to the north west a few miles, among the hills.

A rich man had founded a city, built houses, factories and stores, and for many years the place thrived until a terrible chagres fever broke out among the inhabitants, and swept them away like chaff before the wind.

Since then the place was deserted, unhealthy, and had fallen to decay.

Such was the brief history of the place and the priest went away.

"It will not do for us to remain here," said Frank, "for the priest will tell the authorities of the town that we are here, and they may come to arrest us for the cattle robbery."

"You can depend that the soldiers will be at the Deserted City to-morrow night too," said the doctor, "for you told the old fellow that you expected to meet Frascuelo's bandits there, and secure Don Ramon's daughter from them."

"So much the better, doctor. If we need help we will then get it."

"Where shall we go to Don Ramon's house?"

"It will do no good. He may not be home yet. The best plan for us to follow, in order to avoid suspicion, is to go directly to the Deserted City, and carry enough fruit and water to last until to-morrow night. We can secrete ourselves in the church, and thus be on the spot where the bandits are to meet Don Ramon in good season."

"But suppose the rascals have gone directly there themselves."

"We can avoid them, by exercising some care until we get a chance to get on the coach and secure our weapons."

"Only give me ther loikes av wan hand grenade," said Barney, "an' be heavens I'd clane the worruld av tin greasers who ain't got no right in it."

They left the timber, and after an hour's travel came to the Deserted City.

It was a mere village—everything built of adobe bricks, the roofs tiled, and the streets as narrow as those in most Mexican settlements, with the sewer troughs running through the middle.

A scene of desolation was spread before the four.

Not one house remained standing in its entirety, the crumbling walls being festooned with creeping vines and moss, while the gaunt remains of the huge factories and stores, with caved-in roofs, demolished walls and weed-grown interstices, rose tottering as if about to fall at any moment.

Several turkey buzzards arose idly in the air, and a few lean and sneaking coyotes lurked amid the foundations, but besides the noises of insects and frogs in the slimy ponds that abounded in the streets, there was not any other sign of animation visible.

Our friends felt a chill of horror when they penetrated the city, and experienced a sensation as if entering the portals of a grave-yard.

As they turned a corner Frank paused, uttering an exclamation.

"See there!" he ejaculated, pointing at the ground. "Wheel tracks."

"Then the bandits are here with the Whirlwind," said Vaneyke.

"An' dar she am!" said Pomp, excitedly, pointing up the street.

"It's a church she's forninst too!" added Barney.

The back door of the coach stood open, and they saw that not a soul was on board of her at that moment.

To dash forward at full speed was their first impulse.

In a few seconds they reached the coach and scrambled in.

Juanita was gone.

"They must be in the church," commented Frank hastily, as he ran forward for the pilot-house. "Pomp, fix the brushes. Doctor, repair the wire we had those fellows hanging to. Barney, look to the weapons. I will see if we can work the coach!"

As they all attended to the various duties Frank mentioned he got into the pilot-house, and was thus enabled to look around the corner down the side of the church.

As he did so he saw all the Mexicans clustered around a huge cross that was painted white and planted beside the church.

Over one arm of it a rope had been thrown. The Mexicans held one end.

A noose was made in the other and placed around a man's neck.

The poor wretch was the captain of the civil guards who had been impaled on the ram of the coach, and the poor wretch had his hands

bound behind his back, and was so weak from loss of blood that he could scarcely stand up.

"They are going to hang him!" cried Frank, angrily. "Hear them yell."

"Ah, what a pity!" gasped the doctor, finishing mending the broken wire.

"Musha, my Lord!" roared Barney, entering with a number of hand grenades and dashing out on the front platform. Go for thim bastes, Masther Frank, or be me sowl, it's clane inter them me legs I carry me in wan minute ter give them bally-hoo wid these grenades!"

"De brushes am on!" announced Pomp, coming in.

"Then away we go to save that poor fellow from the lynchers!" cried Frank, turning the starting lever and grasping the wheel.

And away shot the Whirlwind on its errand of mercy.

The bandits heard it coming and glanced around.

Instantly a dozen revolvers were aimed at Barney.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DUEL IN THE CHURCH.

"HAUL away on the rope and hang him!"

It was this stern command that pealed from Frascuelo's lips, as he saw Frank steering the captured Whirlwind toward the cross beside the church, upon an arm of which they had slung a rope to lynch the captain of the guard who had been impaled.

The bandits had their weapons pointed at Barney, who stood out upon the platform in front of the pilot-house, and they were taking aim to fire, when the Irishman let fly a grenade.

It struck the foot of the cross. There came a terrific explosion.

Up in the air flew a mass of dirt and stones, while the white cross was torn to pieces, and the remains of it flew in all directions.

The unfortunate soldier was killed outright, and although many of the Mexicans were wounded by the flying missiles, none received any fatal injuries.

They scattered, uttering the wildest cries.

"Give them another!" shouted Frank.

"Wid me best regards!" roared Barney, as he let another drive.

Boom! went the bursting dynamite shell in the midst of the flying horde, who were heading for the church door.

One of the bandits fell headlong to the ground.

His legs had been literally blown from his body, and the keen knife-edge of the cow-catcher struck him an instant later, and tossed his body out of the way of the coach.

Before Shea could hurl any more of the bombs, the bandits crowded into the ruined church and vanished.

The coach came to a pause.

"We must keep them cooped up in the church," said Frank.

"An' what fer?" demanded Barney, in surprise.

"To-morrow night Don Ramon de Castro will be here."

"Och, but it's Juanita they must have in the sacred precincts."

"Certainly they have. They expect a million dollars ransom for her, and the old don being the richest planter in Panama, will doubtless come here with the money, as he dearly loves his beautiful daughter."

"But begob, it's ter marry her Frascuelo is intintionin'."

"As he has not got a priest handy he can't do so yet."

"Troth, an' it's well he ain't, fer—"

Bang, bang, bang!

Three rifle-shots interrupted Barney.

They came from the windows of the church.

"Come in here," shouted Frank. "They will drop you."

"Howly Pether," gasped Barney, as he scrambled around to the door and passed into the pilot house, which had its windows protected by the wire screens. "Am I shot, or am I escapin' wid me loife?"

The bullets had come close to him enough to blow a draught through his "Galways," but not one of them penetrated his skin.

The doctor and Pomp fired two shots back through the loop-holes in the carriage, and shattered the colored glass panes in the church.

After that they heard nothing more from the bandits.

The day following dawned.

Our friends kept the coach where it was, and remained secluded.

There was plenty food and water on board,

but it was doubtful if the bandits had any, for the deserted city afforded nothing to eat or drink.

"They can't remain there long," said Frank to the doctor. "We will starve them out, if we can't get at them."

"Is there no other mode of escape for them than the door and windows on this side of the building?" questioned the doctor.

"None that I beheld."

Frank had scarcely made the last remark when there sounded a thunderous crash over their heads that shook the coach from roof to truck, and they glanced out and saw a huge stone fall.

It had hit on top of the pilot-house.

This roof was made of corrugated steel plates.

"They are on top of the church bombarding us with rocks!" cried Frank.

He started the coach forward at full speed.

Scarcely had he done so when a perfect shower of rocks came thundering down on the spot evacuated by the coach.

One glance upward showed them the bandits on the roof of the church hurling the broken masonry down at them.

"By jingo! Frank, they might have finished us then," said the doctor. "We did not leave any too soon."

"Send a few shots up at them, boys," called Frank.

Barney and Pomp seized their rifles, and as the shots began to peal out, the bandits rapidly vanished from view.

Frank brought the coach to a pause.

"We are at a safe distance from them now," he remarked.

They remained there until the night was far advanced.

Then they descried Don Ramon approaching through one of the streets mounted upon a large mustang.

He cautiously drove up to the church, dismounted, left his horse standing and entered the crumbling edifice.

Frank sent the coach back near the church.

As it came to a stop again, there suddenly sounded the hoarse voices of men shouting inside, mingled with Juanita's voice screaming, and a volley of pistol shots.

"There is a row!" muttered Frank.

He impetuously snatched up his repeating rifle, sprang from the Whirlwind, and was rushing toward the door of the church, when the jingle of breaking glass at one of the windows caused him to pause.

Glancing up he saw Don Ramon's figure come through the shattered glass, clutching his daughter in his arms.

"Back! back!" he shouted, looking into the church over his shoulder and aiming a revolver. "Dare to follow me, and I shall fire!"

"These bills you have paid for the girl's ransom are counterfeit," the voice of Frascuelo yelled from within the church.

Don Ramon laughed.

And sprang to the ground.

Then he mounted his mustang and sped off with Juanita in front of him.

Out of the door rushed the the bandits to fire after him, when they were confronted by Frank, with his rifle at his shoulder.

One shot pealed out from the crowd.

The ball whistled past Frank's head, and struck the beast on which the old don was mounted.

It fell, throwing the old gentleman and the girl to the ground.

A yell of delight pealed from the Mexicans, and they made a start for Frank, when he coolly cried:

"Hold on, there, or I'll drop you."

"Down with him!" roared Frascuelo, "he is alone."

Whizz! came a huge bowie knife flying through the air, and the handle struck Frank instead of the point, as was intended.

He uttered a groan, and fell dazed.

Pomp was just jumping out of the coach to go to his aid, when several of the Mexicans dashed down the street toward the old Don and his daughter.

The others rushed for the coach to carry it by storm.

Frascuelo remained behind.

His evil glance had fallen upon Frank, and a sinister look swept over his dark face.

Grasping the inventor by the throat, he dragged him into the church and pulled his dagger out of his sash.

"I will end the strife between us," muttered the vindictive wretch. "I am tired of being foiled so often by him."

There was no one in the dark church to see him.

He felt sure of having no interruption to the tragedy.

A light streamed in through one of the colored glass windows upon him as he bent over Frank with the dagger uplifted, for the search light of the coach was turned upon it.

The variegated colors shed a weird glow upon the scene, and made the huge Mexican look like a demon.

Down plunged his knife, and the point struck Frank.

But it could not penetrate the shirt of steel mail he wore, and the edge turned aside with a metallic click.

A furious expression came hissing from between Frascuelo's clenched teeth, and he seized Frank by the hair, pulled his head up on his knee, thus baring his neck, and once more aimed a murderous stab at his victim's jugular vein.

Frank's senses had been gradually returning all the time.

He realized in a flash what was occurring.

And flung himself upon the floor as the dagger descended.

The flashing blade barely escaped him.

Frank rolled over and over on the floor, and then, with all his wits about him, he sprang to his feet with his own knife in his hand.

"Demon!" he cried, hoarsely. "So you wanted to murder me, eh?"

"I cut your throat!" the Mexican hissed.

"Only the work of an assassin could be expected of you."

"We must settle the old score now, *carramba!*"

"Yes, and with interest!" cried Frank, running up to him.

Frascuelo got a tight grip on the handle of his knife, and half bent over, he rolled back the cuff of his right wrist.

There was a tigerish look in his black eyes, for he knew that all parts of Frank's body were invulnerable, and that he must strike for his throat or head to gain his point.

They paused within a few feet of each other, and fixed a steady glare upon each other's actions; then they began to circle in the gleam that poured in through the window.

Several passes were made at each other.

But they were parried.

Both were skillful knife-handlers.

Frank held his weapon in his right hand, and glided in toward the Mexican as if to deal him a right handed blow.

Frascuelo turned his body sidewise, and stepped to Frank's left with the agility of a panther, when with a swift motion Frank passed his knife from his right to his left hand behind his back, as the Spanish fencers do.

Out shot his left hand clutching the knife, as straight as a dart, and as Frascuelo was anticipating the blow from Frank's right hand, he caught the point in his side.

"Oh! *Ave Maria!*" he cried.

The blade was gliding swiftly into his vitals, but he was quick enough to leap back a step, and thus unsheath it.

A terrible twinge of pain passed through him.

"First under cut for me!" grimly said Frank.

"Maledictions upon you!"

"Keep your ribald curses, you beast!"

"Hal! There—take dat!"

Whizz came his knife stright for Frank's neck.

He tossed his head to one side, and the edge of the knife glanced along the skin on his neck, and gave it a slight incision.

Before Frascuelo could withdraw his weapon Frank's shot out and upward, piercing the Mexican's wrist through and through.

He uttered a yell of pain.

"Cut again!" he panted, jerking up his arm and dislodging the blade.

Then he turned around, rushed back several paces, tore out his handkerchief and rapidly bound it around his wrist.

He expected to see Frank follow him.

The inventor saw it.

A scornful smile curled his lip.

"You need not be alarmed," said Frank, contemptuously. "I am only playing with you. Just as soon as I am sufficiently amused, I will kill you. I see very plainly that I am more skilled than you with these weapons. I will give you every possible advantage to protect yourself."

"Den come on, I am ready!" ungraciously snarled Frascuelo, advancing.

But just then the coach rolled away outside.

The light ceased to shine in through the win-

dow, and the interior of the church became enveloped in the densest gloom.

Now the combat was destined to become serious.

A duel in the dark was a trying ordeal, but Frank did not flinch.

Indeed, he glided softly forward on a hunt for his man, and the big bandit moved away as quietly as a shadow.

All sorts of ruses were resorted to, in order to locate each other, but they were wary, and careful not to betray themselves.

Frank kept going, groping his way.

Suddenly he stepped in an open aperture in the floor.

He felt himself falling downward.

Instinctively he flung out his hands, for his knife fell from them, and they clutched the edge of the flooring, when a loud laugh pealed out.

Frascuelo knew at once what happened.

He lit a wax match, and, glancing at Frank, he crept over and raised his knife to stab him.

Below Frank yawned a black pit.

He shuddered, but let go, preferring to escape the descending knife.

Down he shot, down, down like a cannon ball.

Then he struck.

There was a fearful shock, and then all he came a blank.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HUMAN TARGET FOR THE KNIFE THROWERS.

WHEN Frank recovered his senses he was aching all over, and he found himself tied up in a standing position against a huge stone idol in the form of an obelisk.

It stood in the midst of a ruined Toltec city, the huge blocks of stone scattered in confused masses all around showing him conclusively that an earthquake must have razed the city to the ground.

The idol was an enormous relic towering fifty feet above Frank's head, being composed of huge blocks of soft stone sixteen feet square each way, the back carved with two grooves in which were rows of squares fancifully decorated with strange hieroglyphics.

There was an enormous face with a pair of big hands under it on the front where Frank was tied, and above, beneath, and on each side of it innumerable queer devices and small faces.*

The stone was soft and spongy.

A few yards away stood Frascuelo and his men talking, and pretending to yet be unconscious, Frank listened to what they said.

One of the men was tethering a number of mustangs near by, and the early morning sun was streaming down full upon Frank.

"Did you say that those thieves in the coach picked up Don Ramon and his daughter ere you could reach them, Manuelito?" the bandit chief was asking one of his men, as he nervously toyed with his bound wrist and kicked at a stone.

"The old doctor steered up to them," said the individual addressed, "and while the negro hurled several of those bombs at us the Irishman went outside and rescued the two. They gave us the demon's own work after that to get back to the church again."

"Yes, Pedro told me that the coach pursued you, and that the ram on the front struck Domingo in the back and left him a corpse in the street."

"It was the truth, Frascuelo."

"*Por dios!* If we allow those accursed north-erners to continue as they have been going, within a short time they will wipe us all out of existence. What became of the coach?"

"It went back to the city."

"They probably wanted to rescue our prisoner. But after a desperate fight in the church, during which he gave me two knife thrusts, he fell down in the open trap in the floor and dropped into the crypt beneath the church among the remains of the dead men of the Deserted City."

"Was that where you found him senseless?"

"Yes—of course. And I also found an underground passage in which I carried this inventor. It led me out to the road by which we came to this place. Emerging from the cave, imagine my amazement to meet with you after you eluded the coach."

"What did you take the fellow with you for?"

"Just because I had lost my dagger. Had I it at the time I found him, it would have been buried a dozen times in his body, after I had stripped him of his shirt of mail and put it on myself. But I kept him as a hostage in case one

was needed. Now, however, that you are all safe, we need trouble no further with him."

"Are you going to give up Senorita Juanita?"

"No, senor. Allow me to propose that we remain here a day or two in order to give her time to get safely established at home again, when we will once more abduct the beautiful creature. And by the holy Trinity, if Don Ramon again tries to cheat me with spurious currency, I shall make a pincushion of him for our daggers."

"It would please me to do it now with this Frank Reade, Jr."

"An excellent suggestion! *Amigos*, the stone of our ancestral god of the sun is flexible. Draw your blades and stand at ten paces from the prisoner. We will try our own skill to see how near we can bury the points of our daggers in the stone around him without puncturing his skin. By the holy cross, it will be rare sport if he has revived and sees it."

"See—he has regained his senses now, Frascuelo."

The man, unfortunately, had seen Frank looking at them.

"True! True!" exclaimed Frascuelo, delightedly. "His body shall not now be so impervious to knives, but hereafter mine shall be safe enough. Call Juan. He must share the sport, and leave the mustangs be."

"Juan!" bawled the man spoken to.

"Ay, now. What is it?" shouted the one with the mustangs.

"Come here to join the sport, and let those animals be."

"In faith, since it cost me such an effort to steal them and drive them to this place for you, they are worthy of some care and attention!" grumbled the man.

Every Mexican in the gang drew out his knife, and they stood in a group some distance away from Frank.

Knife throwing was their favorite pastime.

Some were skillful and some were not.

Frank calculated upon it, and saw that his life hung in the balance.

"Now, Manuelito, proceed," said Frascuelo, with a coarse laugh. "And I pray you, boys, do not kill him. Reserve that pleasure for me. I will have the last throw for myself, when I see how adept you all are, and my knife shall pierce his heart, and pin him to the stone!"

"Hola!" exclaimed Manuelito.

He drew back his knife over his shoulder, and let it fly swiftly.

The blade glittered and flashed in the sunlight as it whirled around in the air, and sped toward the human target.

Frank felt a faltering at his heart as he watched it, but did not flinch.

Ping! went the knife beside his face.

"One inch from my left temple!" shouted Frank, coolly.

"Ha! He is courageous!" said Frascuelo, half admiringly.

"Perhaps a sharp cut too close may stop his tallying, said a man near by.

"See if you can pin one of his ears to the stone, Francisco!"

"Watch my knife then," replied the man with a brutal laugh.

He let it fly and the point just missed Frank's head on the other side.

"A better throw!" he shouted. "Half an inch of my right temple!"

"He is game to the last," remarked Frascuelo.

He fastened a critical glance upon Frank but saw no pallor of his cheek nor a lessened dauntless light in his bold eyes.

"Next, Mario!"

The third man flourished his bowie and flung it.

"Better still," called Frank. "He has pierced my clothing without cutting me!"

Half a dozen knives came whizzing toward him, sticking in the soft stone all around him, and it required all his nerve to prevent himself trying to dodge them and retain a calm exterior.

When the last man had his throw and pinned Frank's hat to the stone, Frascuelo stepped to the front, flourishing a huge knife.

His eyes sparkled and snapped, and a satanic grin overspread his face.

"*Carrai!* It is now my turn!" he exclaimed pompously.

Frank felt as if his doom was sealed.

Still he would not show any cowardice to his brutal enemy.

* An idol of this kind was found in Copan, Central America, made by the Aztecs or Toltecs.

"Aim well," advised Frank coolly. "I am ready."

"Prepare then to die."

"I am always prepared."

"Good-bye. Your last moment has come."

Frank burst out laughing, and it made Frascuelo scowl darkly to thus be held in contempt and defiance.

He muttered something to himself about a "*sin verguenza*" (shameless fellow), and raised his knife to hurl it.

He calculated for Frank's heart, and being the most expert of his men he felt sure of hitting the mark plum center.

But he was not quick enough.

A pistol shot pealed out from behind the monolith.

The bullet was aimed by a crack shot.

Pomp!

It struck the bandit's knife blade, and shattered it to pieces.

"Bull's eye!" yelled the old darky, appearing from his covert.

For the space of a minute an intense silence prevailed among the bandits, for they were too much astonished to utter a syllable; then they all recovered themselves, and a veritable howl arose in their midst.

"The negro!" shouted Frascuelo, furiously.

There was not a man in the crowd who did not draw his pistol.

"Massa Frank, I see cut de ropes!" muttered the old darky. "Jump!"

Frank suddenly found himself free of his bonds, and in an instant he had stepped out of the circle of knives that encompassed and outlined his body in the face of the idol.

"Where are the rest?" questioned Frank, expectantly looking around.

"Way down de road, sah. I see all alone," responded Pomp.

"Have you got a pistol for me?"

"Heah am one ob mine."

"Get behind the idol—they are going to fire."

A sharp volley pealed out just as they got their bodies protected, and they opened fire upon the bandits, wounding two of them.

The mustangs were all tied together in back of where Frank and Pomp stood, but they were not staked, as Frascuelo had called upon the man Juan before he could do it.

Frank saw that the odds were fearfully against them.

"Fire another shot, and run for their animals!" he muttered to Pomp. "Once upon their backs, we may escape back to the coach."

"Golly! What a target we've gwine fo' ter be. Reckon dat it wuz lucky I done come on ahead of de Whorlwin', sah, or yo'd abein' in de lan' of glory by dis yere time fo' suah."

They fired several more shots at the Mexicans to scatter them, and saw the rascals run amid the rocks for shelter.

Frascuelo, though, seemed to divine their object, for he made a dash for the mustangs to corral them, just as they ran toward the tough little beasts, and leaped upon the saddles of two.

The bandit seemed to be intent upon the same plan.

Frank saw that he was pulling a large navy revolver out of his red sash and fired a shot that grazed the Mexican's scalp.

Frascuelo had already bounded into a saddle and he toppled over on the mustang in a stunned condition, his weapon dropping to the ground.

The bandit did not fall from the mustang though.

As soon as Frank saw it he shouted:

"We will carry him along with us, Pomp!"

And up he leaped in his saddle, and ran with acrobatic agility over the moving mustang's backs, until he reached the beast beside the one bestrode by the bandit chief, when down in the saddle he dropped and seized Frascuelo.

Pomp yelled at the mustangs and they dashed away in a bunch, just as the Mexicans began to emerge from behind the rocks with the intention of running after them.

Fleet of foot as the bandits were the mustangs were much swifter in their movements, and quickly distanced them.

Frank kept a tight clutch upon his enemy, and glancing back at the Mexicans, he saw them begin to shoot.

Down flat over the saddle he laid, several singing bullets flying over his head, his voice encouraging the mustangs on.

The little beasts held together well, and might have carried them to a place of safety out of range of their enemies' weapons had not a ball killed one of them.

As the little creature fell the rest had to drag

it, owing to the whole lot being fastened together by their bridle reins.

It brought the pack to a pause, and with a wild yell of exultation the bandits ran faster toward them.

"Fire on them, Pomp! Check them a moment!" called Frank.

"I see gwine to, Massa Frank!" cheerfully answered the coon.

Then his weapon spoke spitefully.

Frank did not wait to watch the result, but sprang from his saddle, grasped Frascuelo and steadied him a moment, and then he went to the mustangs' heads, fearless of their plunging and kicking, and untied the dead one.

As soon as the bridle was loosened it separated the pack.

Instantly upon finding themselves free, there was a stampede among the little horses, and Frank just had time to vault into a saddle when the beasts dashed off.

He ranged up to Frascuelo's side again and held the senseless bandit in the saddle, when the two dashed on side by side, Pomp following.

A volley was fired after them by the infuriated Mexicans, and the leaden messengers of death hummed around Frank and Pomp like hail, as they turned their mounts into a road that would lead them to the place where Pomp had left the electric coach.

"Once I get this outlaw into the coach, I'll force him to confess to where he has hidden the ten jars of precious stones of which he robbed us on the isle of diamonds!" Frank exclaimed, as Pomp came dashing up to him on a fiery little beast. "It may be our only chance to recover the treasure, Pomp."

The darky was about to reply when suddenly his attention was attracted by something in the road ahead of them, and he gasped:

"Look dar! Look dar! Oh, Massa Frank, I specs dat we nebber see dem diamonds agin now, fo' suah!"

What mystery did these impressive words portend?

Frank followed the direction of Pomp's glance, and with a violent start and a tremor in his voice, he replied:

"I fear you are right. If we learn the secret of the diamonds' hiding-place now, it will be a mighty strange thing to me!"

And Frank had good reason for his remark!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PRIEST AND THE SNAKE.

FRANK and Pomp did not have their fears for nothing, for in the road, directly ahead of them, stood the gigantic figure of Isaac.

The white face of the savage Jew was haggard, his blue eyes shone with a brilliancy that was feverish, and he had an intent look fastened upon Frank and the insensible Frascuelo.

"He has followed us here from Mexico!" muttered Frank, in dismay. "His implacable hatred for Frascuelo has urged him on to pursue the Mexican, as he swore he would, to take the bandit's life; and now that he sees the Mexican he will keep his oath, for he attributes the downfall of his race of giants at the White City to this man. And if Frascuelo is wrested from me before he recovers, and is put to death, how am I going to find out where he has hidden the ten earthen jars of diamonds?"

Thus it will be seen that our friends had cause for uneasiness.

They checked the wild flight of their fiery mustangs, for the men in the Toltec ruins were left far in the rear by this time, and well out of shooting range.

The electric coach which Pomp had left on this road was not anywhere in sight, as it should have been.

"Hold, my friends!"

The deep, clarion voice of Isaac pealed out with this stern order.

The mustangs dashed up to him and paused.

"Isaac, I am glad to meet with you again!" cried Frank, bending over and grasping the giant's hand with a hearty pressure.

The big fellow pointed significantly at Frascuelo.

"I have trailed him here from Mexico!" he said, using the Spanish language, which Frank was speaking.

"You shall pay your debt of vengeance."

"Terribly! terribly!"

"But you must wait."

"No! What you ask is impossible!"

"He is unconscious."

"Then I shall revive him."

"Isaac, all the treasure of your kingdom is in his power."

"That is a strange assertion. I do not understand it."

"Then I will explain," said Frank, telling what occurred.

"You wish then to learn where he buried the jars?" Isaac asked.

"As only he may know—such is my desire," Frank answered.

"Give him over to me, and I shall learn of him."

"Only under that condition, Isaac."

"As a price for his body, I present you with the jewels."

"In that case see that I am paid by learning his secret."

"You shall soon know where they are. Hand him to me."

He reached out his eager, trembling hands, caught hold of the big Mexican like a vise, and lifted him from the mustang.

There was a frightful look upon Isaac's face.

Rage, triumph and cruelty were blended there very strongly, and Frank saw that the passions of the man were working at a pitch that was rare with him.

"God help Frascuelo!" the inventor muttered pityingly.

Clutching the bandit as a dog does a coveted piece of meat, the giant strode toward a dense woods bordering one edge of the road.

Then he paused and glanced back.

"I have news of your friends for you," said he.

"Friends!" echoed Frank. "To whom do you refer?"

"My affinity and her friend."

"Ah! Panchita and Fitzgerald?"

"Yes. The soldiers saved them from the Indians."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Then they were taken to the nearest town and were married."

"Can it be possible?"

"And together they went on a railroad for Vera Cruz, bound northward."

"They are safe then. I am delighted to hear it."

"By this time they must be back in the city of Mexico."

"I feared that they were dead, or else in serious trouble."

"No. I was there to protect my heart's affinity as I would my own life!"

The strange religion of Isaac's tribe made nature's noblemen of a barbaric race who practiced cruelties without remorse, because it happened that they generated without Christian enlightenment.

As Isaac spoke, he flourished his hand.

"Adieu! We shall meet again!" he exclaimed.

Then he plunged into the bushes and vanished.

"Hold on!" Frank exclaimed.

But the giant was gone.

It nettled Frank to be thus abruptly left.

He had no word of explanation, no appointment for the future, and seemed to have simply captured the bandit chief to deliver him into the hands of his enemy that Isaac might wreak vengeance upon him.

"Massa Frank, him done gone," said Pomp, sentimentally.

"So I see."

"Dat white niggah mighty squar' dough, sah."

"Yes, I know."

"Befo' yo' know it, he gwine to tu'n up agin."

"I hope so."

"Sides dat, didn' he pay yo' fo' Frascuelo wid de treasure?"

"But where is it?"

"Specs it am on de isle ob di'mon's yit, honey."

"Without information we would have a useless hunt for it, Pomp."

"Wha' de mattah wif askin' one of de odder greasers?"

"It would not do any good, you simpleton."

"G'way, chile! How yo' spec' Frascuelo could lift all dat weight ter hide de big jugs hisself? Oh, no. De rest of his men ha' ter help him fo' suah."

"I don't doubt that part of it," said Frank, "but Frascuelo is such a sly, cunning rascal that he would not leave any one know where so much treasure is hidden. He don't trust his men's honesty out of his sight. He don't want his throat cut by them. They would do it to gain the treasure all for themselves."

"Wha' yo' spec, den?"

"That he got his men to help him hide the jars. But I'll bet he returned alone to the spot, and removed the diamonds from the jars, and put them in some other hiding place."

Pomp laughed long and loud, for the notion struck him comically.

"Reckon yo' ain't got no confidence in Frascuelo and his men," said he.

"Not a particle. Ah, there is the coach around the bend in the road."

While conversing, they had been riding slowly ahead, and now saw the Whirlwind standing beside the trees.

In the pilot-house stood Dr. Vaneyke, Barney, Juanita and Don Ramon, all of whom waved their hands to Frank and the darky when they saw them riding up.

The moment our friends were within the coach, and explanations followed, the two mustangs were chased away, and Frank turned to the doctor, and asked him curiously:

"How did you happen to get on my track up here, when the last time you saw me was when Frascuelo pulled me into the little church in the Deserted City? I forgot to ask Pomp about the matter."

"We returned to the church to see what became of you," the doctor replied, "and found a trap-door in the floor open—"

"The one I fell through."

"Yes, for descending into the vault beneath, we found your knife there. Soon we discovered tracks in the dust that led us to an underground passage, and we followed it out to this road. Here we found the Mexicans' trail. It was easy to guess that you was their prisoner, and we followed the trail. Pomp was sent on ahead to reconnoiter the ground, and we came to a pause here."

"An' I done find de ruin an' sneak in dar," chuckled the darky. "Den I git 'hind de idol while de greasers wuz atalkin', an' I cut yo' bonds. Golly, dough, I done fink dat dey'd stick yo' wid der knives."

Don Ramon then expressed a wish to be taken home with his daughter, and Frank turned the coach around, and sent it flying along the road, back toward the plantation.

They soon reached it.

A large door in de Castro's house was opened by a porter, and watched curiously by his large retinue of servants, the Whirlwind ran into the great court yard inclosed by the building.

The house was square in shape, one story high, with tiled roofs and the sides were pierced by numerous iron-barred windows.

Upon the Don's invitation our friends resolved to remain a few days with him, to rest themselves ere going back to Mexico to unearth the white savages' treasure which Frank now owned.

The favor they had rendered the Panama grandee had won his friendship, and nothing in his house was too good for the four hardy adventures while they remained his guests.

"We shall have to take our departure to-morrow though," Frank told him after the second day of their stay was coming to a close, "for we have a long journey before us, and many things to do."

"In that case," responded Don Ramon, stroking his white beard complacently, "I will give you an entertainment to-night which should have been delayed a week hence. My daughter was to have been married to a neighbor's son next Wednesday, but the wedding shall take place to-night instead. Frascuelo might have prevented it, if you had not interfered with his plans, and saved my child from a living death. It is therefore proper that you should see the happy ending of what might have been a fatal disaster."

"Nothing will give me more pleasure," said Frank smilingly.

The old gentleman then left Frank, to apprise his friends of the news, and sent two servants out, one to call in a priest, and the other to summon the bridegroom.

The man who went for the priest met the reverend gentleman on the outskirts of the town, directing a swarthy Mexican to an hotel, and paying no attention to him, the servant addressed the priest with:

"Don Ramon de Castro desires your presence to-night, to unite his daughter to Alfonso Santa Cruz, instead of next week, good father."

"Tell him I shall be there early, Joaquin," the priest replied.

The servant hurried back home with the message, and the Mexican pointed at the basket the priest carried, and remarked:

"You carry that basket very gingerly, I perceive, senior."

"So would you, if you knew what it contained," laughed the priest. "I have an emblem here of monstrous size, of Satan!"

"A snake?"

"A huge rock snake."

"From where?"

"It was caught in the church yard."

"But whither are you carrying it?"

"To the town, to present it to a friend who will kill it, and stuff the skin for me, as I am addicted to a collection of natural curiosities."

"Why didn't you kill the reptile yourself in capturing it?"

"Because I would thereby have spoiled the skin, no doubt."

"Ah, I see," said the Mexican, as he withdrew a tiny vial from his pocket. "But is there no danger of the snake writhing about, and bursting off the lid of your basket, good father?"

"I have a dread of it, I must confess to you."

"Then let me stupefy the creature with this drug in the vial I carry."

"Most gladly. What is the nature of the compound?"

"Chloroform."

"Just the thing used in a case like this."

"Then here. I will pour the contents of the vial on the basket lid. If you will lean over it, you will hear how it affects the serpent."

The priest complied, when instead of emptying the drug upon the basket, the Mexican poured it all over the priest's head!

"Father of mercies, why did you do that?" demanded the holy man starting up in amazement, and staring at the Mexican who was now laughing immoderately over what he had done.

"Pardon me—ha, ha, ha! It was merely a slip of the hand, senior."

"And it may cost my life! I am strangling—smothering—choking! My mind falters—my brain reels—I lose my senses—I—oh!"

Overwhelmed by the drug the priest fell prostrate.

He laid stupefied upon the ground, and the Mexican dragged him from the lonely road into the bushes, where he hastily exchanged clothing with him. Then he emerged, and seized the basket.

"A fair exchange is no robbery," muttered the man. "And as my face is clean shaven, and the excellent man's big hat hides the fact that I have not got the crown of my head shaved, I may be able in this disguise to pass for the reverend gentleman."

He walked down the road, carrying the basket.

"It will be several hours before the priest recovers," he mused, "and ere he does, I shall be at Don Ramon's house, where I may find some use for the serpent, while I try to plant my knife in the heart of Frank Reade, Jr., and rescue my noble Captain Frascuelo from his power! Ah, truly I am a devoted man, and a faithful friend."

He was Manuelito, one of the bandit's followers, and when he reached the Don's residence he knocked, and was admitted, with his hat pulled down to conceal his features.

He made no remark to the porter, but passed into the court-yard.

Night had fallen, and the lamps were lit amid the flowers and foliage of the garden, and he beheld the coach standing there.

A swift glance around failed to reveal any one looking at him, and he boldly approached the Whirlwind, and entered by the rear door.

Frank was alone in the pilot-house, lubricating the wheel.

A satanic smile crossed the disguised bandit's face, as he opened the lid of the basket, left it in the room and glided through the carriage into the pilot-house.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WORK OF A FIEND.

INTENT upon his work, Frank did not see the disguised man standing behind him, until the pseudo priest uttered a cough.

Then, with a violent start, he glanced around.

"A priest!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"Senior, pardon this intrusion," affably replied the Mexican changing the tones of his voice adroitly. "I was summoned here to officiate as clergyman for the wedding of Don Ramon's child."

"Ah, yes," replied Frank in Spanish.

"Prompted by curiosity, I ventured in here, to see what this is."

"Oh! I understand. It is an electric contrivance for traveling."

"And a marvelous invention, upon my word."

"Of my own construction."

"Indeed! May I examine it?"

"Most assuredly."

The man made a pretext of looking over the

coach, in the meantime holding a dagger concealed up the flowing sleeve of his vestment, and Frank having finished his work and dried his hands on a piece of cotton-waste, asked him:

"Is there anything I can explain to you, sir?"

"Much, if you will be so kind and condescending."

"Well, it is run by electricity."

"But to what use do you put the coach?"

"Thus far, I have utilized it to run down a noted bandit."

"Indeed; and you have doubtless captured him?"

"Yes. He is safely out of mischief now."

"Why, what have you done with him?"

"Put him in the hands of an avenger whom he has wronged."

"To whom do you allude?"

"A white savage named Isaac, who has been pursuing him."

The disguised Mexican could with difficulty suppress a startled cry, but he managed to control himself, and asked huskily:

"And what has that creature done with the bandit?"

"Carried him away to wreck a direful vengeance upon him."

"Do you know where?"

"No; I have not the remotest idea."

"Have you any other uses for this coach?"

"We—that is—my friends and I live in it and go about the—"

"Live in it?" interposed the bandit. "How—where?"

"There is a department in back. Come in and I will show you."

"Lead the way, senior."

Frank, unsuspecting of danger, passed into the carriage, saying:

"In entering you must have passed through here."

"Yes, but it was so dark I could not see anything."

"Then I will turn on the arc-lights."

"It is not necessary, senior."

Frank reached up, however, but as he did so his foot stepped on the rock-snake which had crawled out of the basket, and he lost his balance on the yielding, curved back of the reptile and fell.

The Mexican kept well in the background.

He had no desire to share Frank's fate. There sounded a sibilant hiss in front of Frank as he went down with his full weight on top of the snake, and a chill of horror passed over him as he realized what he fell upon.

"A snake!" he gasped.

Then he made an effort to arise.

But like a flash the snake coiled its enormous folds about his body, and ere he could prevent it his arms were wrapped at his sides, and his legs were bound so that he could not move.

A fearful pressure was brought to bear upon his lungs that squeezed the breath out of him, making him gasp.

His eyes started from their sockets, his tongue began to swell as did his lips, and while his face became surcharged with arrested blood, a fearful ringing in his ears began.

The contraction of those deadly folds became unbearable.

He felt as if he must die.

"Help!" he gasped, feebly.

Then he saw the snake's head curve around in front of his face from the back of his neck, and the beady, fascinating eyes were fastened upon him like twin balls of fire, while the forked tongue darted in and out of the mouth with a quick motion.

"Help! Help!" he gasped again, with a feeling of horror.

Before his strained vision the size of the serpent became magnified a hundred fold, while its hideous aspect seemed to augment until no demon of darkness ever dreamed of seemed half as terrible.

For a moment the great head swayed to and fro with a graceful, undulating motion in front of Frank's face, the hiss that escaped the monster getting louder and louder each moment, until it fairly seemed deafening.

Frank felt that his senses were leaving him. He could not stand the strain any longer.

The Mexican merely laughed remorselessly. His plan suited him.

"The serpent will kill him," he muttered, "and Frascuelo will be avenged. This coach will fall into my hands. I will steal it and go back to Mexico to get the jars from the cellar under the fallen palace of Isaac, and all the diamonds will be mine."

The magnitude of the immense wealth dazzled him.

It incited him with cupidity.

And it lent him unlimited courage.

He watched the snake closely, and saw its gaping mouth raised, its head drawn back, and knew that it was about to dart forward and bury its teeth in Frank's shoulder.

The sight made even the stoic rascal shiver.

He turned aside his head.

"I cannot witness it!" he muttered.

But just at this critical moment a convulsive movement of Frank's body brought the body of the snake against a live wire from which the

hear it and come in to ascertain the cause," muttered the Mexican.

The idea of it made him desperately reckless.

He listened, and located the thrashing snake.

Then he jerked the knife out of his sleeve, and glided into the compartment, half bent over, to plunge the knife in Frank.

His foot touched the inventor's body.

Back came his knife for the fatal lunge.

Before it could dart forward, the arc lights flared up in the coach, and the place was illuminated as if by sunlight.

Barney stood before them.

Attracted by the noise, he had just rushed in.

The bandit uttered a cry, and arose, facing

went out with him through the pilot-house door, while Manuelito breathed a fearful invective upon Barney for arriving just in time to foil him.

The Irishman carried Frank to a settee, upon which he laid him, when the Mexican regained hope.

Seeing the door porter passing, he called him. "My good man, open the large door," said he. "The wedding guests will drive into the court yard soon."

"Yes, father," replied the man, bowing.

The Mexican entered the pilot-house and closed the door.

He knew how to operate the coach perfectly



With the greatest agility the Irishman ducked his head, and the beast flew over it, and landed on top of its companion! Then a vast surprise awaited the eager Mexicans.

rubber insulation had broken off, and it received a terrible shock of electricity.

A spasmodic contraction of the body ensued.

Then it relaxed.

Uncoiled.

Frank was free.

Relieved of the awful pressure he revived.

The snake writhed, squirmed and twisted upon the floor, its coils lashing and banging at everything in its way.

The Mexican uttered a cry of chagrin.

He did not know what occasioned the snake to let Frank go, and as hard as he peered into the room, he could scarcely see anything save the dim outlines of Frank's prostrate body.

He dared not go in for fear of the snake, and he was afraid to strike a match for fear of attracting the attention of any one in the garden to the spot when he might get in trouble.

What to do, he did not know.

In the interval of thinking, Frank was fast reviving.

The snake had lashed itself to the other end of the compartment, and its spasmodic convulsions created a loud noise.

"If this goes on much longer some one may

the Irishman, while the startled Barney glared at the priest in equal amazement.

Manuelito quickly recovered his wits.

"The snake!" he cried, pointing at it, and speaking in Spanish.

"Wuz it proddin' Masther Frank yez wor?" growled Barney.

"No. The serpent enfolded him and squeezed him."

"But ther position I caught yez in, bindin' over him?"

"I was trying in the dark to kill the reptile to save him, senor."

"Oh! So that's ther way ther wind blows?" queried Barney, who spoke in English, and observed that although each used his native language, they perfectly understood what each other said.

"Yes, senor," replied the priest, humbly.

Barney saw that Frank was reviving.

"It's around he do be comin' now," said he.

"Thank heaven for that. I thought he was doomed," hypocritically answered the disguised Manuelito.

"Carry him out in the air."

The snake was in the kitchen by this time.

Barney picked Frank up in his arms and

well, and as soon as he saw the big doors go open, he turned lever No. 1 around, and as the machinery got in motion, he grasped the wheel.

"Howld on! Stop that!" yelled Barney, seeing the coach going.

His suspicions of the priest had been aroused, and he ran after the coach at the top of his speed.

"Go to the deuce!" the delighted Mexican muttered.

"Stop the coach!" roared Barney, furiously.

He just had time to grasp the hand rail and leap upon the rear steps, when the coach shot out the door.

His cries brought every one into the courtyard.

Dr. Vaneyke saw the Whirlwind rushing away down the road, and as the scared Pomp came out, he exclaimed:

"Some one has gotten off with the coach!"

"Ain't Massa Frank on it?"

"No. There he lies, sleeping or senseless, on that settee!"

"Den de Lawd help us, sah. Whar am Barney?"

"Clinging to the rear steps of the Whirlwind!"

"Oh, golly!" groaned Pomp, in dismay.

Just then the door porter came rushing in with the priest whom Manuelito had exchanged clothes with, and Don Ramon recognized him.

"Father Celestino!" cried the amazed Don. "What means this disguise?"

Rapidly the priest explained what happened to him, and Frank, having recovered in the meantime, heard all he said.

"Now, I remember the man," he cried, excitedly. "He is one of Frascuelo's band, with his mustache shaved off."

yard. Besides, now that I know his story about the rock-snake in the basket, I can see that Manuelito designedly made a victim of me with it," said Frank.

"The priest said that the chloroform which the Mexican poured on his head only stupefied him for a little while, and that as soon as he recovered he suspected foul play, on account of finding himself in the greaser's garments, and hurried to reach Don Ramon's house," said the doctor.

"Unfortunately he arrived too late to be of any service. Still, all hope of recovering the coach is not lost, as long as you saw Barney

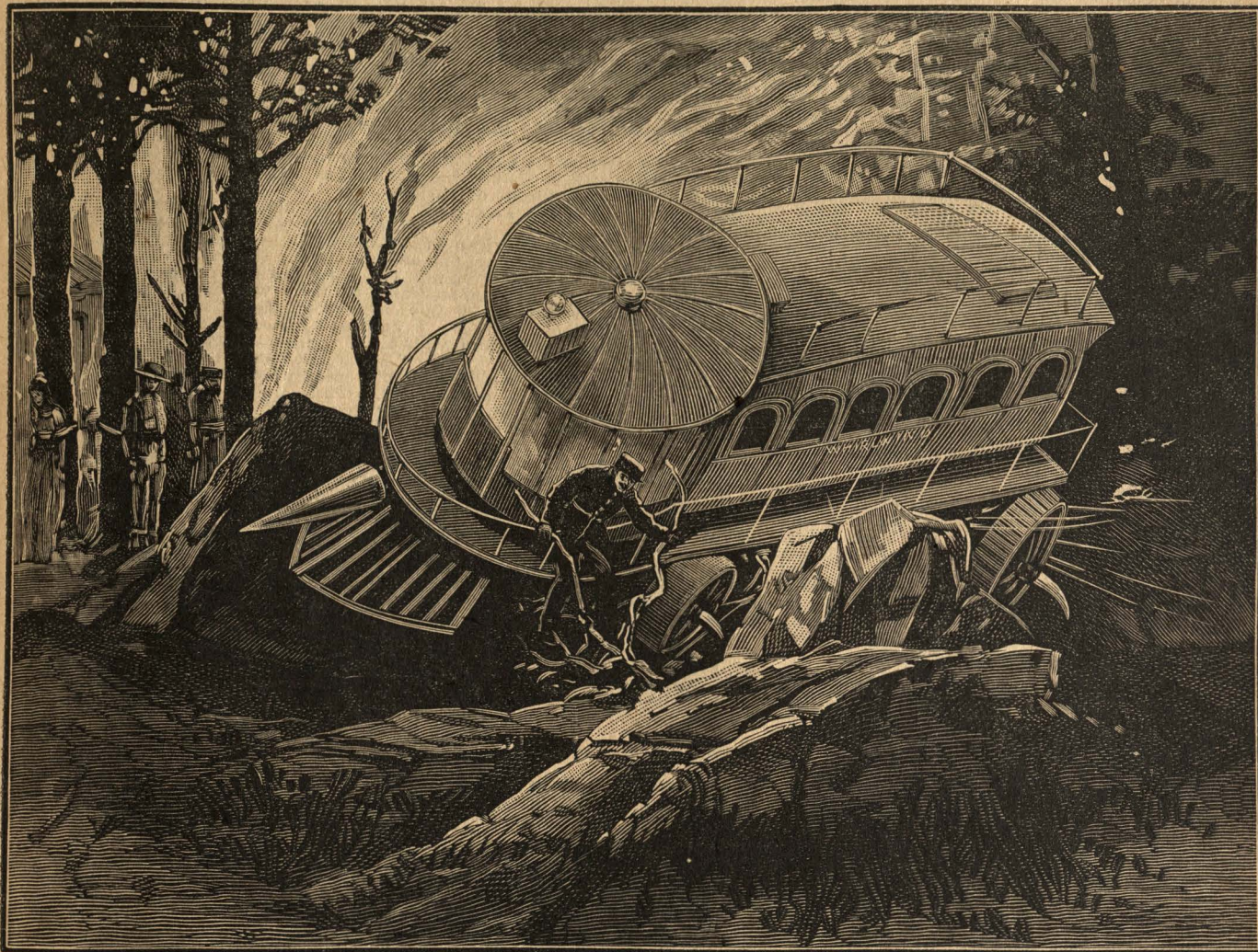
Manuelito, clad in the priest's robe, about which the snake was coiled, with its fangs buried in the man's throat.

The Mexican was dead.

Frank sprang into the carriage, with one slash of his knife he took off the reptile's head, and the writhing body began to unwind and dash the corpse around by its powerful convulsions.

The doctor and Frank dragged the human and the serpentine bodies out of the coach, while Pomp glided forward, toward the spot from whence the sound of digging proceeded.

Peering through the cactus bushes, the coon beheld a man standing neck deep in a hole in



The coach was upset for the first time! A thrill of dismay shot through Frank, and he shut off the power. He scrambled out through a window and reached the ground.

"And he has stolen the coach," groaned the doctor.

"Then come. We must follow it while the trail is fresh, or we may never get the Whirlwind back again, my friends!" cried Frank, and with a hasty farewell to their host, the three dashed away on the broad, well defined trail of the stolen coach.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN WHICH BARNEY AND POMP COME TOGETHER.

"DR. VANEYKE, I have been badly tricked," said Frank, as Pomp and the old scientist ran along with him on the trail of the Whirlwind after they dashed out of Ramon de Castro's house on to the road.

"Didn't you recognize the face or voice of Manuelito?" queried the professor.

"He changed his voice and had his mustache shaved off; moreover, he wore the priest's hat and gown, concealing his features and figure."

"But as soon as you saw the garb worn by Father Celestino, you recognized it?"

"Manuelito's clothes were made in such a peculiar way I could not fail to do so, as soon as the hall porter brought him into the court-

yard, hanging on to the rear steps when Manuelito drove it out of the courtyard."

"You say he questioned you closely as to what became of Frascuelo?"

"Very. And now I presume he has stolen the coach in order to return to the isle of diamonds, and thus secure the entire treasure for himself. The priest can wed Juanita to her lover, for whom Don Ramon sent, just as well in citizen's clothes, as he can in his clerical vestments."

Conversing thus, the two hurried on through the moonlight, and covered several miles, the broad wheels of the electric coach leaving a distinct trail that was easy to follow.

It presently led them in amid a dense cluster of cactus, through which a path had been mown down by the keen-edged cow-catcher and the four scythes attached to the hubs of the wheels. In the midst of the prickly spines stood the coach.

They hastened up to it, but did not see a soul through the open windows, although there came a distant sound as of some one digging.

Frank opened the rear door.

A frightful scene met his view inside.

Upon the floor laid the stiff and rigid body of

the ground, which he was excavating, using a pick.

He recognized him as Barney at once.

There was a dirt-heap, with a shovel sticking in it beside the hole, and gliding up to it behind the Irishman's back, Pomp grasped the implement, and rapidly began to shovel the dirt into the hole upon and around his friend.

"Hey! Mother of Jingo! Schtop that, ye spalpeen!" yelled Barney, popping up his head and making a wild effort to get out of the hole.

There was a broad grin upon the dusky face of Pomp.

He kept right on shoveling in the dirt as fast as he could work.

Barney's feet and legs, half way up to his knees, were buried, and it made him stick fast despite his wildest efforts to extricate himself.

"Murder in Eytalian!" he roared, craning his neck around. "Will yez schtop, or I'll come up out av this an' make yer!"

But just then he saw who was burying him alive, and gouging the dirt out of his eyes, ears and red hair, he yelled delightedly:

"Be jabers, it's Pomp! Howld on, ye ace av spades, it's me yer buryin', bedad! Is this

thank ye, Barney, fer me a capturin' ther coach an' schtoppin' it afther ther tough aould fight I had wid Manulito, an' a puttin' him interther ind room wid ther schsnake, so that ther baste moight ind him?"

Pomp paid no attention to him, however, but kept right on.

Barney glanced up into the darky's face and a look of fear came over his own, for the coon was endeavoring to suppress a grin, and the effort was so severe that his features wore a most diabolical expression.

"Be heavens, he's crazy!" gasped Barney, utterly aghast.

The horrible twist of Pomp's face grew worse, he wanted to laugh so bad.

"Help!" yelled Barney, making motions to ward Pomp off, when down came a clod of dirt all over the top of his head, raining down his back, stuffing up his mouth, plugging up his ears and wadding up his nose.

He sputtered and gagged, spit out some mud and howled.

Buried up to his hips he was unable to move.

"Begob, it's rocks the gorilla 'll be afther pourin' down me troat next!" wailed the imprisoned Irishman. "Git out av this ye terrier! Float off, or it's mush I'll make of yer body immitately, 'pon mesowl!"

He caught up a stone and fired it at Pomp, hitting him on the nose.

The coon uttered a roar of pain, and almost dropped the shovel.

Then he grabbed his nose.

"Good Lawd amassy!" he said.

"Catch me diggin' dacent graves fer imitation praists an' devil'simps av snakes agin an' I'll give yez a bouquet an' a free invitation ter me suicide," said Barney, as he let fly a volley of stones that made Pomp think he was victimized by a cyclone. "Ambulate on, ye kinky-headed son-av-a-monkey! I feel the Eyetalian blood in me veins a-boilin' loike loime, an' if wanst it gets ter ther terrid zone av ther thermometer I'll scorch yer wid me glance!"

Pomp flung down the shovel and ran away.

"Cain't fool wid dat ole bog-trotter wifout he done hab ter git mad, an' me as gentle wif him as a kitten!" grumbled Pomp, heading for the coach. "Wish I had a hose to squate on him. He near took the nose offer me!"

Frank and the doctor had the Mexican's and snake's bodies out of the coach by the time Pomp returned, and the inventor asked him:

"Did anything fall up against your nose, Pomp?"

"Yo' spec' I'se been hittin' de bottle, sah?" indignantly questioned the coon.

"Judging by the size to which your nose is swelled, I should say the bottle hit you."

"Mus' be I'se got a rush ob blood ter de bugle, sah."

"Have you seen anything of Barney yet?"

"Reckon dat he am dead an' buried, Massa Frank."

"The deuce! Has anything occurred to him?"

"Curred ter him dat he am off de earth, I reckon."

"It is evident that you and Barney have had a run in."

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout dat, but I'se gwine ter run in de coach an' cool off, sah."

Frank and the doctor winked at each other significantly, as Pomp entered the Whirlwind out of humor and vanished.

"He has evidently gotten the worst of it," laughed the doctor.

"Still, I'd hate to see Barney hurt," replied Frank smilingly.

"Murder! Rats! Rats! Rats!" yelled Barney at this juncture.

"There he is now," said Vaneyke, overhearing the outcries.

"Foire! Police! Police! Police!" continued the Irishman's voice.

"He must be in a fix!" exclaimed Frank.

"Thieves! Help! Help! Help!" came the distant voice frantically.

"Come on, doctor, and we'll see what's the matter," said Frank.

"I'm up ter me neck! I'm full av bugs! I'm schlowly doyin' feet forst!" howled Barney.

"Will some wan get a derrick an' take me out av this, aven in pieces? Will some sucker hit ther nagur wid a barn, an' hand me a poisoned gundrop, till I take me own loife?"

Frank and the doctor soon found him.

Endeavoring to get out of the hole, the unfortunate Barney had fastened his fingers upon a cactus bush and pulled it down on himself.

He felt as if a bee-hive exploded all over him when the spines began to tackle him; and then he began a wrestling match with the bush.

The harder he tried to throw it aside the worse it stuck to him, and it required the united efforts of Frank and the doctor to get it away, calm his agitation and dig him out of the hole.

The moment he was free, he grabbed the shovel and made a rush for the coach.

"Faix, it's demosthriationin' what moind is over matther, as I'll be after doin' whin I begin ter shovel out me vingeance agin that nagur's back!" he howled, as he dove into the Whirlwind.

In Pomp's berth laid a dark figure, and Barney spit on his hands.

Biff—bang! went the shovel against the figure.

"Take that wid me congratulationin's," said Barney.

And then there came a crash of broken glass, and a tremendous smell of whisky.

He gave one look, and his heart failed him.

Pomp had wrapped Barney's private demi-john in one of his coats, put it to bed with a hat on and then concealed himself in the pilot house.

The moment Barney saw what he had done, he flung down the shovel, gave it a kick that nearly paralyzed his toes and ran out of the coach, begging Pomp to appear and kick him across the Isthmus.

Frank and the doctor buried the Mexican in the grave Barney had so charitably dug, and returning to the coach, they found the coon and the Irishman rapidly getting up a gay and festive "jag" on the remains of the whisky in the unbroken end of the demolished bottle.

They were at peace with each other and all the world, regardless of the fact that they were swallowing enough particles of broken glass to kill an ordinary elephant, and getting rapidly into that ribald state where a man wants to skate on his top knot and use his feet to think with.

Frank left them to struggle the matter out between them, locked up in a compartment, and started the coach off to the northward.

The Mexican had done no damage to anything, and everything seemed to be in good working order about the machinery.

"A two days' trip northward will bring us back to the isle of diamonds now, doctor," said the inventor, "and then we must begin our search for the treasure which Frascuelo concealed."

"I wonder what became of Isaac and the bandit chief, Frank?"

"That is a mystery; but depend that Frascuelo's men won't remain here in Panama to trouble Don Ramon, now that their leader is gone."

"Isaac's vow of vengeance upon Frascuelo will be swift and sure."

"All I hope is that he will discover what the bandit did with the diamonds before he makes away with the Mexican, as we are almost certain to meet Isaac again, for he said we would."

When morning dawned the Whirlwind was going through the mountainous district of Honduras, in Central America, in the vicinage of Teguzigalpa, as she had to go far out of her way, to skirt the headwaters of the Wanx river that ran athwart the course it had been following.

Frank thought he would then have no trouble to proceed, but unfortunately a broad tributary of the river soon loomed up ahead which would carry them still farther to the westward, in the neighborhood of the endless chain of the Sierras.

"If we examine the shores closely, we may find a bridge," the doctor suggested. "You recollect when we came down from Mexico it was in the mountain district, by which we avoided these streams."

Frank pointed up the embankment.

"What is that?" he asked. "A cable stretched across the water?"

The doctor keenly eyed it.

On each bank of the stream stood a tree, with the branches cut off, and stretching over the current, from one trunk to the other was a thick line looking like a wire cable.

Upon a nearer approach he saw that a huge flat-bottomed punt was moored to the shore they were on, near a small hut.

From both ends of the flat boat a similar wire ran up to the cable where they were joined together on a grooved wheel, which ran along the top of the cable.

"It is an old-fashioned ferry boat," said Vaneyke, taking in the details. "The river has a tremendously strong current, and as the boat is shoved off at an angle with the current, the strength of the tide carries the boat over to the other shore. By reversing the slant of the boat,

you can force it back to this shore. It is an old, very old style yet in use in places in the United States."

"The punt is plenty large enough to hold the Whirlwind, isn't it?"

"Why, yes. We will call up the ferryman. I wonder what makes the tide of the stream so swift? There must be a reason for it!"

The coach rolled down a wagon road to the shore, where there was a post, to which a tin-horn was attached.

The doctor alighted and blew a loud, braying blast on the horn, when an old man in a big hat came out of the hut and stared in amazement at the coach, while Vaneyke told him in Spanish that they wanted to cross.

"It will cost you half an onza," said the man. "The farm and sugar cane wagons only pay a few peals. But this queer locomotive is different."

"Here is your payment," returned the doctor, giving him the toll.

"Then get on the boat."

The doctor boarded the coach, and it rolled on board followed by the old ferryman, who cast off the shore anchor, slacked off the stern-line, tightened in the bow-line, and the tide caught the boat.

Out it went upon the stream, with a swift, gliding motion, the tide gurgling and rippling at the side, and the wheel on the cable creaking as it rolled along the top of the wire line.

The old ferryman was anxiously watching the cable, for there was an extraordinary strain brought upon it, and it was old and rusted.

Just as they reached the center of the stream it parted with a loud report.

The flat boat spun around with the tide, and went whirling down the stream.

"Great heaven!" gasped the boatman in horror, "we are lost!"

"What is that?" quickly demanded Frank, through the open window.

"Look ahead, down the river, and see what makes the tide so strong!"

"A waterfall!" exclaimed Frank, in startled tones, as he obeyed.

"Yes, senor, and we will go plunging over it in a few moments."

"Can nothing be done to stop the boat, old man?"

"Nothing, God help us!"

"Oh, doctor, I fear then that the coach will be dashed to pieces."

"Worse than that!" replied Vaneyke. "We cannot swim and breast this swift current, and we will all go over the fall, and lose our lives, too!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TWO GIANTS' RACE FOR LIFE.

THE peril of the boat was extreme, as it went whirling along, each moment its rapidity of flight getting greater as it neared the edge of the fall, over which an enormous body of water was pouring.

There were numbers of jagged rocks along the shores.

As the doctor noticed them, he exclaimed:

"Should the boat strike those rocks, it would go to pieces!"

"By jove, they shall be our salvation!" cried Frank.

"How can it be possible?"

"Hand me a rope, and I will lasso one of them!"

If Frank could do it, the flight of the boat would be stopped, and the doctor hastened to get a line which he passed out to Frank, who had made his way down upon the front of the punt, near the old boatman.

Swiftly the boat was rushing toward the crest of the fall, and Frank coiled the noosed rope, whirled it around his head, and aiming for a high jutting rock, he let the lasso fly.

It whizzed through the air, uncoiling rapidly, and fell.

Into the water.

Short of the mark.

A groan of disappointment escaped the spectators, and Frank turned pale, but he rapidly drew in the line, and made another effort.

By this time the boat was close to the top of the fall.

In one minute more it was bound to go over unless Frank's effort proved more successful than the first.

The rope was stiff and kinky from being soaked in the water, but it shot through the air with a whistling sound, and it fell over another rock, where the noose was pulled tight.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, delightedly. "I've done it!"

He fastened the end of the line to a cleat on the side of the punt, and it came to a pause within a few yards of the top of the fall with the water boiling up over the bow as the stern swung around.

A shout of approval arose from the others. "Come down here, boys, and help me to haul in!" cried Frank.

Out of the coach leaped his three friends. The next moment they had hold of the rope with Frank, and were tugging at it, pulling the punt over to the rocky shore.

When it got to the rocks it came to a pause, and Frank lassoed a tree branch on shore with another rope, when the big flat boat was hauled around the rocks, across the intervening space to the bank.

There it was made fast. "All you will have to do," said Frank to the old boatman, "is to remain on the boat, pole it away from the shore, and we will run the coach along the embankment, with a towing line attached, by means of which we will drag the boat up to the ferry landing. You can then repair your cable and be none the worse for what happened."

The old man was grateful, and said so. Frank then made the towing line fast to the boat and the end of the coach, ran the latter off the former, and as the old man did as he was directed, they soon had the punt back to the ferry on the side of the river opposite to that where they embarked.

Some money was handed to the old ferryman for the extra trouble they had given him, and everyone being on board, the coach made off.

A distinct wagon road was followed to the northward, but late in the afternoon they left it and went out on a plain covered with little hills, inhabited by an army of jack rabbits.

These little creatures stood upon their hind legs, their enormous ears straight in the air, and their front paws together, distrustfully watching the great coach as it went rumbling by.

Taking fright at the least thing, they would dart into their holes and disappear, leaving no sign of life about, only to emerge when all cause for alarm was removed, when they gambled about, leaping with wonderful agility from place to place, chasing each other, and amusing themselves like so many innocent children.

Barney shot a number of them for supper that night, and when Pomp got to work upon them, they had one of the most savory and tasteful dishes the coon had ever prepared.

The electric coach came to a pause for the night in a cluster of trees on the plain, and after posting the doctor on the watch, all hands turned in.

It was an hour after midnight when the doctor aroused Frank to relieve him, when there sounded the distinct pounding of horses' hoofs outside, and they glanced out a window.

A thrilling race for life was observed. Two horsemen were going by, one in pursuit of the other.

"Frascuolo and Isaac!" exclaimed Frank. "The bandit chief has made his escape from the white savage," replied the doctor, "and just see what beautiful big beasts they are mounted on! They go like the wind. Neither of the men are armed. It is a trial of endurance between them and their horses. Both are grand riders. Neither has any advantage!"

In a minute the flying horses were nearly a mile away going like the wind, the riders urging on their mounts by every means.

Frank walked into the pilot-house. "I am going to follow them!" he exclaimed. "Do," replied the doctor, "for I am curious to see the end of the race."

Frank nodded, and turned the lever, when the coach got in motion, and presently increasing speed, began to overhaul the riders.

Within a few minutes the Whirlwind ranged up to them, when Frank regulated speed to keep even with the men.

Both had looked back, and seen the coach coming.

There was an expression of fear upon Frascuelo's rugged, swarthy face, and a set look of stern determination on Isaac's.

Neither of them said a word, and their mounts did not betray any fear of the coach, despite the blue flashes of electricity that darted and glowed at the machinery driving the wheels.

"Shall I stop him, Isaac," shouted Frank out the window.

"No, not unless I fail to overtake him," grimly replied the giant in Spanish, as he glanced up. "He cannot escape me though!"

"How is it he got away?"

"While I was bringing him back to Mexico, he chafed open his bonds while I slept, and fled to a nearby town, where he procured his mount."

"And you?"

"I awakened, followed, and got this horse to pursue him."

"You will have a long ride."

"That matters not to me. But I have news for you."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"He confessed the hiding place of the ten jars of jewels."

"Good. And they are—?"

"In the cellar, under the ruins of my palace."

"I know where it is located."

"There is an arena flagged with stone."

"Yes, my friends told me about it."

"In the middle is a trap door, covering a subterranean room."

"Well?"

"The room was used to receive the dead bodies of men slain in the arena."

"What has that got to do with—?"

"The ten jars were put in this room."

"Yes, yes."

"But the diamonds were subsequently removed, and hidden by Frascuelo."

"Just as I suspected the treacherous dog would do."

"He feared the dishonesty of his men, and was caring only for himself."

"But where did he transport the diamonds to?"

"He will not tell, but swears that he will show me when we arrive at the isle of diamonds where I intend to sacrifice his life as Abraham did attempt in ages past, save that no voice or hand but that of the Almighty shall stay my obsidian knife from piercing his heart!"

"Let me stop his horse and make a prisoner of him. You can then come on board the coach and we will return to the isle together in a shorter space of time than the horses could do it."

"That is an excellent plan, and I agree."

Frank attached an electric wire to a binding-post in the base of the long ram and threw a strong current in it.

With a fearful hiss a streak of fire shot out of the end of the ram, and zig-zagged over to the Mexican's horse like a lightning flash.

The streak touched the poor beast. It gave a wild, pathetic neigh of agony.

The light scorched his spine. With one fearful bound it arose in the air.

An exclamation burst from Frascuelo's lips. Down came the horse, and when it struck the ground it was dead.

The fearful electric shock killed it. Frascuelo sprang from the saddle ere it sank down, and Frank shut off the current and stopped the coach.

The first impulse of the Mexican was to run, but Isaac dashed up like a thunderbolt and sweeping alongside of him he caught hold of the bandit by the neck.

Exerting his wonderful strength he lifted Frascuelo off the ground bodily with one arm and flung him across his saddle bow.

Before Frascuelo could recover himself Isaac's horse dashed up to the now stationary coach, and with one fling the bandit shot in through the open rear door from the giant's hand.

Barney and Pomp had been aroused from their slumbers by the motion of the Whirlwind and were ready for Frascuelo.

Ere he could get upon his feet they seized him.

And bound his arms behind his back. And secured him to a ring bolt in the wall.

Isaac dismounted, struck his horse, sending it galloping off, and entered the coach, which Frank started again.

"Is Frascuelo safe?" he asked, briefly.

"My friends have him bound in the end room," said Frank.

"When do you expect to reach the isle of diamonds?"

"To-morrow," answered Frank.

"I will rest myself. I have not slept in a week."

"There is a bed in there for you."

With a haggard, gloomy look, the giant entered the sleeping-room, and turning into a berth he slumbered at once.

He was evidently much exhausted.

"Poor fellow," said Frank. "He must be nearly dead."

"No ordinary man could stand the fatigue he underwent," said Vaneyke.

The coach came to a pause again near a

stream that flowed among some rocks, and all turned in but Frank, who kept watch.

He sat in the pilot-house on the settee, and fell into a reverie.

An hour passed by, during which he failed to hear a soft grating noise made by Frascuelo, who was sawing and rubbing his bonds against the rough ring bolt to which Barney tied him in the kitchen.

As continual drops of water will wear a hole through iron, so did the Mexican's perseverance wear out his bonds, and one binding parted.

It was then an easy matter to get off the rest. Once free, he drew Pomp's carving knife from the rack on the kitchen wall, and with it held in his mouth, he crept on all fours into the next room to the pilot-house.

The four sleepers were breathing heavily. He dared not disturb them then.

All his hatred was concentrated upon Frank. The inventor had his back turned to the Mexican, and was so wrapped up in his thoughts, he did not expect foul play.

Frascuelo arose softly to his feet, his black eyes gleaming with a demonical expression, and drew back the knife, aiming to stab Frank between the shoulder-blades.

CHAPTER XL.

FORCING THE BANDIT TO TERMS.

"RASCAL! I have caught you!"

"Oh! Ave Maria!"

"Good Heaven! What is this?"

The first speaker was Isaac, the giant, the second was Frascuelo, and the last startled exclamation proceeded from Frank Reade Jr.

A long bladed carving-knife fell ringingly to the pilot-house floor of the Whirlwind as the white savage clutched the bandit's wrist when he was in the act of stabbing the engrossed inventor in the back.

An instant afterwards the Mexican was struggling fiercely in the hands of his enemy, and Frank having bounded to his feet, and turned around saw that the giant had awakened just in time to save his life.

Isaac only required one minute to subdue Frascuelo.

He caught the bandit by the shoulders, pressed his knees against the swarthy ruffian's back, pulled him over, and with his spine fairly cracking, the Mexican dropped to the floor of the coach.

Isaac fell on top of him.

It was no trouble to hold him down.

The noise of the scuffle aroused the three sleepers, and as soon as they saw that Frascuelo had burst his bonds, and had been up to some mischief, Barney opened a locker, and took out a pair of handcuffs.

"Begorra, he won't get those off so aisy!" said he, snapping them on the bandit's wrists, behind his back. "Now it's a chain I'll be after using, ter kape ther spalpeen held ter ther ringbolt, an' Saint Moikel an' farty jackasses wouldn't be able ter break it, be ther powers!"

Frascuelo was then secured again, and they saw how he had chafed off his first bonds by rubbing them against the ringbolt.

"You not will hold me, carramba, wid dese!" exclaimed Frascuelo with a scowl, as he rattled the chain, and showed his teeth.

"Guess yo' dunno dat Ise heah," answered Pomp, sitting down with a potato-pounder in his fist, and shaking it at the man. "Might jes' as well hab a bull-dog awatchin' yo', ole yaller face!"

"Are you going to guard him?" queried Dr. Vaneyke.

"Reckon I is, sah. It am dis chile's turn to go on watch, ain't it? Den yo' all turn in again. Ise gwine ter stay right heah, an' if dat greaser done try ter open his mouf, I'll slam dis pounder in de cavity, an' ram de teef down his bronchial tubes, fo' shuah."

Satisfied that the darky would watch the man well, they all turned in and finished their night's repose in safety.

The next day they were aroused by feeling the coach go tearing across the country, and saw Pomp at the wheel.

His rifle was up to his shoulder, and he pointed it through the open window, took steady aim for an instant, then fired a shot.

"Ki, dar!" he yelled, lowering his weapon and eagerly seizing the steering apparatus. "Done hit him plum in de bull's-eye!"

"What are you firing at?" demanded Frank, entering sleepily.

"Looker dar—ain't dat wuth de trouble?" eagerly asked Pomp, pointing.

"A fine stag!"

"Wot means a fine breakfas', sah,"
 "It is wounded—"
 "An' dar it falls, dead!"
 "Hurrah, Pomp, you're a dead shot."
 "Dat's why de stag's shot dead, Massa Frank."

The coach was brought to a pause, and Pomp went out and carried in the carcass of the beast, skinned and dressed.

A good breakfast of venison steak followed. Each one took a turn at the wheel, as the coach had to be kept on the move at a rapid rate of speed, and by noon time the Whirlwind was once more in the Mexican territory.

Frank stood alone in the pilot-house with Isaac, the rest being scattered outside and inside of the coach, and the big giant sat thinking for awhile, when suddenly he addressed the inventor with:

"You saw last night how uncertain and treacherous Frascuelo is?"

"He's hard to hold, and a vengeful scoundrel," replied Frank.

"Exactly. Now, if he should escape, how could you ever learn where he has hidden the jewels of which you are in search; for remember, while he is at large he might get killed and carry his secret to the grave with him."

"The only way to do is to anticipate such an event," replied Frank.

"Precisely what I was just thinking of."

"What do you propose to do, Isaac?"

"Force him to confess where he concealed the jewels."

"He refused to do so before, though, you said."

"Under mere questioning, but I did not resort to torture."

"Nor will I do anything barbarous."

"As he is obstinate you won't learn any other way."

"Let us try him and see."

The giant arose and went into the kitchen, unfastened the Mexican from the chain that linked him to the wall, and dragged him into the pilot-house without saying a word.

In the meantime Frank thought out a plan of procedure.

As soon as the man was seated, the inventor took hold of a wire, unscrewed it from a binding-post, and coiling it around Frascuelo's neck, he twisted the ends to the wire making a collar of it.

Frascuelo watched his actions uneasily.

He squirmed and fidgeted, looked anxious, and when Frank turned a lever and put on a slight current he bounded to his feet with a cry of fear; and while a cold, clammy perspiration, burst out all over him he cried in trembling frightened accents:

"Holy Virgin! What are you going to do to me?"

"Force you to betray the hiding-place of the diamonds you stole," said Frank.

"No!" exclaimed Frascuelo, suppressing his alarm, snapping his teeth together with a vicious click, and looking dogged and calm, "I won't!"

"Do you feel the current in your neck?" asked Frank, while a gratified expression came over the silent giant's face.

"It amounts to nothing. You cannot alarm me with electric shocks!" disdainfully answered the Mexican.

"If I turn this lever half way round on the switch-board," said Frank, "a current will fly into your body that will daze your brain. If I still turn it three-quarters of the way around the force of the electric heat will be so great that the wire will burn your flesh. Still continuing to turn it all the way you will get a shock that will kill you."

The Mexican shuddered.

"Give me the last mentioned shock," said he. "Do not torture me."

"If you refuse to answer me truthfully I will try the first move."

"No, no! By the soul of your mother, no!"

"Should you remain obstinate I will try the second move."

"Mercy, mercy, as you hope for pity yourself!"

"If that fails," said Frank, coldly, "I will kill you with the current."

Pale, trembling and frightened the Mexican's face was drawn, his eyes were distended and his nostrils were dilated, while the veins stood out on his forehead as if ready to burst.

"Let me execute him," said Isaac, sonorously.

He eagerly bent over and reached for the lever, but Frank pushed his hand aside, and Frascuelo uttered a smothered cry of alarm, for they both saw that the giant was anxious

and would not hesitate long about putting on the full force of the battery.

"Wait!" remonstrated Frank, covertly, darting a meaning glance at the big fellow. "You might let your hand slip accidentally and put an end to his life ere we learn where the diamonds are."

"Very well," reluctantly answered Isaac.

"Now your answer!" said Frank, grasping the lever.

He fastened a questioning glance upon Frascuelo, and the Mexican began to cry and groan and beg for mercy with all the eloquence he was capable of, but Frank remained inexorable.

To bring the matter to a climax he turned the lever a little, and as the extra current flashed through the bandit he uttered a yell, fell down upon his knees and cried, hoarsely:

"Stop it! I will confess! I swear it! I will tell you!"

A smile passed over Frank's face, and without touching the lever, he asked:

"Where did you put the diamonds, Frascuelo?"

"Shut off the electricity and I will tell you."

"I won't reduce the current until you confess."

"Then look for the diamonds down in the well under the ruin."

"Did you put them there?"

"Yes. The well is dried up. The jewels lie at the bottom."

"Swear it!"

"I swear it!"

Frank shut off the current entirely.

"If you are lying, Frascuelo, remember that I will seek a terrible vengeance."

"Oh, I am telling the truth."

"Return him to the kitchen, Isaac."

The copper wire was taken from the bandit's neck, and he sighed as the giant led him into the other room and fastened him up.

"You did well," said Isaac upon his return.

"Whereabouts is the well located which he referred to?" asked Frank.

"In the palace cellar, in a niche in the wall back of the stairs."

"Is it very deep?"

"No more than the length of this coach."

"Then, if he was not lying, I will easily get the diamonds."

"And I will be in the neighborhood to assist you."

"Where are you going to, Isaac?"

"Back to the White City."

"What do you intend to do with Frascuelo?"

"Make him recover the diamonds from that well for you."

There was a sinister emphasis to the man's tones which Frank noticed at once, and he observed a terrible look on Isaac's face.

"There is a hidden meaning lurking in your words," said Frank.

"Yes, a fearful, frightful meaning," replied the giant grimly.

"I thought you were going to avenge your wrongs on Frascuelo?"

"There is no way in which I could do so better or worse than by making him recover those diamonds for you, my friend."

"I am at a loss to understand you."

"Wait, you will learn in due time. I have simply reserved the fate for Frascuelo which he has designed for you."

Frank was puzzled at these words.

He could not understand their purport.

But he was soon to have a terrible revelation of the truth.

The coach sped on over hills and plains, through streams and wood and just before the fall of night it came in sight of the four lofty mountains, in the valley between which lay the isle of diamonds.

"In one hour we will be on the diamond island," said Frank.

He followed the old road back, and they saw that the smoke and fire of the volcanic mountain were gone, and no one would have dreamed of its existence were it not for the hardened lava beds running down from the peak.

Not a vestige of water remained on the bed of the lake that once had surrounded the island, and as they crossed one of the half demolished bridges they shuddered at the desolate look of the place.

The winds had blown away considerable of the dust that had been deposited by the volcano upon the city, and left bare the fallen blocks of stone, the broken pillars and masses of other debris that came from the ruined houses.

Here and there protruded the bodies of hundreds of the natives and Mexican bandits, who perished on the night of the eruption, and as

Isaac, the monarch of all this once beautiful spot, stood up and glanced at the ruin of his kingdom a fearful look crept over his face.

His gigantic body trembled, and the storm of agitation that went over him was pitiful, yet terrible to see.

Only one agonized moan pealed from his lips.

His bosom heaved, his eyes flashed and his nostrils dilated, then he broke down completely and covering his face with his hands he gave away to a mournful flood of bitter tears.

"My kingdom is gone!" he whispered.

"God's will be done."

"Our friends pitied this great but fallen monarch sincerely, and were silent out of respect for his feelings of intense woe."

The moment he saw Frascuelo his mood changed.

A hard, cruel look took the place of his sorrowful expression.

"To him I owe this desolation," he thundered, his eyes flashing as he waved his hand over the scene. "I am the last of my tribe—the avenger—and direful shall be the death struggle of the one who has blasted my existence."

When the coach reached the city it came to a pause in front of the fallen palace, and every one but Pomp alighted and went down in the cellar.

Frascuelo was yet handcuffed, and Frank carried a rope.

The well was in the spot designated by the bandit, a circular wall of masonry, breast high, the interior dark and forbidding.

"It was down here you flung the gems?" asked Frank.

"Yes, senor. Go down and see if I am lying," replied the bandit, surlily.

"No," thundered Isaac. "You shall explore it first."

He seized the rope, tied it around Frascuelo's ankles, and ere any one could prevent it, he flung the Mexican over into the well.

Frascuelo uttered a shriek and shot downward.

The rope played out a dozen feet; then Isaac stopped it, fastened it to a stone, leaving the bandit hanging, head downward, a few feet from the bottom, and, flinging down a torch he carried, he cried hoarsely:

"This is my vengeance. Look down into that pit of Hades."

Yell after yell, curse after curse, pleading after pleading came up from the depths below in the terrified voice of the burly Mexican.

Frank peered over the edge, turned pale, and reeled back in horror.

The bottom and sides of the well, in which the torch had fallen upon the diamonds, were alive with hissing, squirming snakes.

The angry, disturbed reptiles were darting out and upward on all sides of the Mexican, whom the glowing torch revealed, stinging and biting him until his last expiring cry rang out. And there he hung, bloated to fearful size by their poison, his face rapidly turning purple and blotched—a corpse.

CHAPTER XLII.

RECOVERY OF THE TREASURE.

TERRIBLE had been the vengeance of Isaac, and when he saw that his long-wished-for deed of retribution was consummated, he fell down upon his knees, with tears streaming from his eyes, and raising his clasped hands heavenward, he cried brokenly:

"Oh, God! Great is thy power; merciful thy precepts; wonderful thy grace. My people can repose in peace, in the last slumber. I can now die and join the hosts of my tribe, for the beauties of life no more have charms for me."

He bowed his head, and he might have remained there a long time, had not Frank gently aroused him by grasping his arm.

"Isaac, it was terrible!"

The white savage sprang to his feet, his mood changing instantly.

"It was just!" he cried, vehemently, "but not terrible enough to appease the raging thirst in my bosom for his death. Were there a million lingering tortures to which he could have been put, each one could not atone each death in my once happy tribe which he caused."

"Let us not dwell upon it."

"You are right. It is maddening."

"As long as we remain upon the scene, the feeling will stay."

"Then get the gems, and we will leave the isle of diamonds forever."

"It shall be done."

"You shall return to your city happy and prosperous. I shall roam over the wilds of my native land, a wanderer without home and

friends, until the great Jehovah calls me to reign again over my people in the mystic land beyond the skies. But come. Enough of sentiment. To work. First, I will draw the carcass up and feed it to the carrion birds and beasts who will now infest this beautiful isle."

"In the meantime I will smoke out the snakes."

"That is the only means by which they can be driven away, yet he who descends into the well must have care lest they return, and bury their venomous fangs in his body and kill."

"In an hour we shall depart with the jewels," said Frank.

The giant dragged up the repulsive body of the dead bandit, and conveying the blackened and bloated corpse with several of the poisonous reptiles still adhering to it, over to one of the windows, the savage let it fall out a dozen yards.

Below the windows was a steep declivity in the earth that once served as a sewerage for the white city, the grass and herbage all gone, a foul odor arising, and a slimy pond covering the bottom.

Isaac fastened the end of the rope to the window.

The body hung down over the pond, swaying with the wind, and a prey for the buzzards that were flying about the foul trench.

It was a fearful ending of Frascuelo's criminal life.

Frank and his friends had not been idle in the meantime.

They collected a lot of inflammable material and dropped it down the well upon the burning torch, which set it afire, when a dense smoke began to arise and fill the well.

Then the flames burst forth.

Fiercely raged the fire for fully an hour, and the walls of the well became so hot and the aperture so choked up with smoke, it became manifest that the reptiles must be dislodged.

There were a number of large boxes in the coach capable of holding the treasure, and having had them brought into the cellar with a small shovel, a rope ladder and some ropes, Frank waited until he could get down into the well in safety.

When all the smoke was out the ladder was fastened at the top and let down in the hole. A box was lowered with the ropes by Barney and Pomp, and carrying a lantern Frank descended.

He found the diamonds all lying intact under the ashes of the fire, all the snakes gone and plenty room to work.

Then he filled the box with the gems and his friends hoisted it up.

Box after box was lowered, filled and elevated until not a single diamond remained in the bottom of the well, when Frank ascended.

The boxes had all been stowed away in the coach.

Then they all left the cellar, and Isaac closed down the stone trap.

The moon was shining full, clear and beautiful upon the ruined city, and myriads of twinkling stars glittered and spangled the azure dome of the tropical sky, while a soft breeze stirred the foliage.

Isaac held out his hand to Frank.

"We part forever!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Do not say that, Isaac, for we may meet again," gently replied Frank.

"My mission upon earth is done!" said the giant, drawing a knife from his belt. "I die, to join my brethren!"

He raised the glittering blade to plunge it into his own heart, a mournful smile upon his haggard, pale face, and a despairing look glistening in his large blue eyes.

Frank seized the wrist of his knife hand, and stopped the fatal blow.

"Be a man!" he cried thrillingly.

The giant's muscles relaxed, as his earnest glance fell steadily upon the eyes of Frank, and his arm fell powerless to his side.

In the voice of Frank Reade, Jr., there was a tinge of magic, for no man could hear him speak and fail to heed what he said.

"A man?" echoed Isaac, faintly.

"Be a king!" cried Frank.

"A king?"

"Live as other monarchs have lived, die as they have died, and your duty shall be done as becomes one of your exalted station!"

Isaac was staggered.

"But I would die as did the king of old who fell purposely upon his sword."

"No! You must live until you depart by the mysterious decree of fate."

"I shall follow your wise council," said Isaac, dropping the dagger.

"Will you go to civilization with us in the coach?"

"No. I would die, out of my element, which is this isle."

"Then I bid you adieu, for we are going."

The last farewells were spoken, and the coach rolled away to the main land over one of the bridges, with its burden of treasure.

The last they saw of the massive, commanding figure of Isaac was when he stood on a heap of broken masonry, with his tearful eyes and clasped hands raised heavenward, as if he was appealing to God to pity his distress.

Then the ruined city and the diamond island vanished from view as the coach went over the spur of a mountain and descended a sloping grade on the other side toward the plains.

"We have gained what we set out to get," said Frank, "and now we can start for home again, sell the diamonds, and once we reach civilization, collect the government reward we gained by breaking up Frascuelo's counterfeit den."

"I had almost forgotten the \$50,000 due to us," laughed the doctor.

"Shure it's nabobs we'll soon be, Pomp," chuckled Barney, nudging the darky in the ribs so hard that he made him grunt. "Och, but we wor born fer it. Luck at the aristocratic blood we has! Shure, there niver was wan av me own ancesthurs who wuzn't born widout a sprig av shamrock an' a shillalee, let alone a golden soup ladle in his gob."

"Dunno nuffin 'bout youse furriners," said Pomp, "but dar wuz a king in Dahomey, or else souf ob de Jordan, what started de fambly I done come from; an' it's no more'n right dat I shed be goin' to whar yo' come from, an' buy a tittle ter start up de lineage again."

In truth they could not fail to realize what an enormous fortune the treasure of the white savages would give each one of them, for it was the greatest they ever yet had discovered.

They paused for the night upon reaching the plains, and after a hearty meal, the four sat down around their camp fire and began to discuss the best route to the northward.

It was decided to remain where they were for a day or two and count and weigh the diamonds, in order to form an estimate of their value, for Frank had a small scale in the coach.

Accordingly this was done the next day.

It was late in the afternoon before their work was half completed, and they sat in the pilot-house around a small, portable table back of the wheel, busily engaged at their work, when a shadow suddenly slanted in through one of the glasses.

Looking up, Frank was startled to see a dark featured man peering in at them counting and weighing the diamonds.

He looked much like a half-breed Mexican, and wore the garb of a countryman, but he sat astride of a pony and carried a mail bag strapped over his shoulders.

There was a startled yet avaricious look delineated upon his features when he saw what a vast treasure their friends were handling.

Before he had been there a minute, Frank had a revolver aimed at him.

"Hands up, stranger!" he shouted.

"Oh, senor, what would you do?" cried the man in alarm, as he obeyed.

"Tell us what you are sneaking about prying in here for."

"Why, I am the mail carrier between San Jose and Agua Clara."

"Humph! Is that all?"

"Nothing more. Your strange locomotive lies across my regular trail, and, arousing my curiosity, I came to see what it amounted to."

"Have you gratified your curiosity?"

"Entirely so."

"Then put spurs in your mount and be off."

"You are kind, senor; I shall not forget you in a hurry! Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the man, as with a relieved look, he rode away.

There was a sarcastic inflection to his words that jarred on Frank's ears disagreeably, and he turned to the others, remarking:

"Had that fellow a chance to get his fingers in here, he would have made this heap of diamonds smaller, and his pockets fuller."

"Did he see what we were doing?" questioned the doctor.

"Undoubtedly, and to-morrow we may get an attack."

"From whom?"

"The lazy vagabonds of San Jose, whom he may bring back here with him to try and wrest this treasure from us."

Having sized the man up, Frank's estimate of

his honesty was not gauged very high, for the fellow certainly had a villainous face.

They continued their work until far in the night and leaving Barney on guard they turned in, thoroughly tired out.

Frank's suspicions of the mail-carrier were well founded, for the Irishman had not been on guard long when the Mexican crept from amid the nearby bushes flat on his stomach, and crept over to the coach, under which he crawled with a wrench in his hand.

Without making the slightest noise he unscrewed one of the knives from the driving-wheel and then took off the nut, leaving the Whirlwind in such a state that she could not run far before the wheel would fall off and the coach have to pause.

The rascal got away without being seen.

He vanished silently in amid the bushes, and several hours passed.

Barney sat in the pilot-house whistling a lively tune and thinking deeply of home, when suddenly there sounded a pistol shot outside.

The jingle of broken glass followed.

A bullet screamed past the Irishman's face.

"Be heavens, it's an assassin!" he yelled, bounding to his feet.

He saw that one of the windows was broken, and peered out to see who fired at him, but it was a dark night, and his eyes could not penetrate the gloom and see the score of dark forms lurking in amid the bushes from whence the shot came.

Aroused by the noise, Frank and the rest rushed into the pilot-house.

"What is the matter?" demanded the inventor.

"Shure, an' we are attacked," replied Barney, hastily closing the shutters.

He had hardly done so, however, when there sounded a volley of rifle shots outside and a rain of bullets against the sides of the coach.

Frank rushed to the rear door to lock it and the windows, when in through the door and windows swarmed a band of armed men.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STRUGGLE FOR THE LOST WHEEL.

THE foremost of the men to enter the rear door of the coach was the mail carrier who had seen Frank and his friends weighing the diamonds, and the others following him and climbing in through the windows, were dressed like Mexican countrymen, as their leader was.

As soon as Frank saw the fellow and his armed companions, he surmised that they had come to try and wrest the diamonds away from them, else they would not have made such a rough invasion.

Unaware that the mail carrier had secretly taken a knife and cut off one wheel of the Whirlwind, the inventor darted back into the pilot-house and turned one of the levers.

Instantly the shell of the coach became charged with electricity, and the men climbing through the windows got a shock that wrung loud cries of distress from their lips.

They either fell into the different compartments of the carriage or out of them again, and the ones coming through the rear door were brought to a pause by the antics of their electrified friends.

"Stop where you are!" shouted Frank.

"Never!" cried the mail carrier. "Attack them, boys!"

A yell arose from the half-breeds, and they were just upon the point of advancing with their rifles, when up went both of Frank's hands, a revolver in each.

Bang! Bang! went two shots.

The marauders were so densely packed together that they got the bullets, and two of them were wounded.

"Out of here with you!" shouted Frank.

A score of rifles were pointed at him, and he might have been shot down had not Barney seized him, yanked him into the pilot-house, and slammed the metallic door shut.

A volley pealed out from the aggressors' rifles, but the bullets could not pierce the door screening our friends.

"Begob, I wuz nearly hit be a spalpeen av a bullet which wan av thim rapscaillions fired from out there, beyant ther bushes, in ther dark," said Barney, "an' it wor a volley they dhruv at ther coach afterwarwards."

"It is a dark night, and favors their plan," said Frank.

"Can't we get them out of the carriage?" queried the doctor.

"By risking burning the coach up."

"Then try it."

"I'll turn lever No. 4," said Frank. "It will fill the coach with sparks."

"Whar am my gun?" growled Pomp. "Ise gwine out fo' ter 'tack dem in de rear, sah. Gosh amighty, whar am dat gun?"

"Hold on until I try this!" advised Frank, turning the lever.

He had hardly done it when a furious uproar ensued in the compartments of the coach, the men yelling and struggling to get out.

They were caught in a tight corner.

From every wire in the room there shot blazing streaks of light in sharp tongues, every contact with the men filling them with agony and fear, and they made every effort to escape.

Some had their clothing set on fire, some had their faces and hands scorched, and the livid darts of flame exploded the ammunition carried by others, that happened to get in the way.

The excitement grew furious, the uproar terrible.

In less than one minute not a man remained in the coach, and if Frank had not shut off the electricity, and rushed out with the rest to extinguish the flames, the entire interior of the coach would have been destroyed.

While they were so engaged, those of their enemies outside who had recovered their wits, began firing through the windows at them.

Pomp hastily closed the shutters and locked the rear door before any of the flying bullets could do any harm.

Outside, the thwarted half-breeds recovered, and began to build a huge fire under the coach to which they set a match.

Instantly a tremendous blaze arose under the Whirlwind, the lurid flames leaping up in huge licking tongues all over it.

Soon the interior of the coach got very hot.

"We can't stand this much longer," exclaimed Frank in disgust.

"Start the coach ahead, and we will run away," advised the doctor.

"De fire can't do us no burnin'," said Pomp. "She am all steel."

"Faith, I'd jest as lief git roasted as briled," Barney growled.

Frank started the Whirlwind, and she rushed away from the fire, followed by a wild yell from the half-breeds.

Then the fire was left behind the coach.

It was no more than Frank's enemies designed.

They came rushing after the coach at full speed, firing shot after shot at the flying coach to deceive our friends.

The tampered wheel struck a stone presently.

Then the very thing happened that the marauders were expecting.

With a hum the wheel flew off the axle.

It rolled away.

Down went the coach at one end, and the revolving wheels nearly flung it over down an elevation it was then on.

"A wheel is off!" exclaimed Frank, in deep chagrin.

"Stop power, quick, or you will have the coach ruined," said the doctor.

Frank complied, and the motion of the tilted, rocking, dragging vehicle ceased, when up ran their enemies again and surrounded it.

Our friends heard their voices.

"See here!" said Frank. "The loss of the wheel is a put up job on us."

"How are we to proceed without it?" asked the doctor.

"We can't. Nor can we get a new one molded in this country."

"Then I'm at a loss to know what we will do."

"I must recover the lost wheel at all hazards."

"I'll turn on the search-light so we can locate it, Frank."

"All right, doctor. Barney, give me the shirt of mail I recovered from Frascuelo. I must go out and get that wheel!"

Barney opened a locker, and withdrew the entire suit, which Frank at once proceeded to don over the clothing he had on.

He then adjusted a steel skull cap and armed himself with a knife and a brace of good revolvers.

"Now, doctor, I am ready," he announced.

"What do you want me to do, Frank?"

"Swing the reflector of the search light around till you locate the wheel."

"Very well. It won't take but a moment to find it."

"Barney and Pomp can guard me with their rifles."

"Faith we will kape ter ther loop-holes on ther soide yer on, sor."

"One thing more now, and I will go out."

"Name it, Frank."

"I want a direct wire from the dynamo to carry."

"Hold on then, and I'll unwind a spool, and connect it."

"Be careful to fasten the end I carry to an insulator, and I will connect it to the little instrument I have in my hand. You can turn on the full current as soon as I go out, and this tiny box I carry will control the volts."

Frank's plan was executed.

He then left the coach by the rear door.

The professor had located the wheel and the knife lying several hundred yards away, guarded by several of the half-breeds who were grouped around it.

As soon as Frank appeared the men saw him and fired a volley at him, but to their amazement they observed that he came gliding on toward them, evidently uninjured.

"Take better aim. You all have missed him," cried the mail carrier.

They did not yet see that Frank had on a suit of mail, for he took care to keep out of the brilliant glare of the search light.

A spiteful volley was fired at him.

Not a single bullet missed hitting his shadowy figure, yet he did not seem to mind it in the least degree.

The half-breeds were very much puzzled over the circumstance, and after several more shots were vainly fired at Frank, their amazement gave away to superstitious alarm.

A pallor began to spread over their faces, and they gradually recoiled step by step before the advance of the bold inventor.

"Man or devil, I care not which, but I'll end this farce!" the mail-carrier cried, exasperated and chagrined to see how futile their efforts were to kill Frank.

The man had a long-barreled rifle in his hands, and he made a dash for Frank with it upraised, as if to dash the inventor's brains out when he stepped into the glare of the light.

As the half-breed had to turn suddenly from the gloom into the vivid stream of electric effulgence, it momentarily blinded him.

He staggered back a few paces.

Before he could recover himself, Frank doubled up his fist and struck him a violent blow on the jaw, knocking him down.

He retained his clutch on the rifle.

Several of his men surrounded Frank.

Then they ran in toward him, intending to overwhelm the inventor by sheer force of numbers.

Every man had his rifle pointed at Frank's head.

For an instant it looked as if they would blow it off.

But whirling around on his heel, Frank touched a small platinum key on the little box he held in his left hand, and with a sibilant hiss a streak of electric flame a foot in length and as narrow as a pencil shot out of the box.

As Frank turned around the fearful volts struck every man surrounding him with the force of a cannon ball.

They shrieked with agony and fell to the ground as if stricken with clubs, for the terrible pointed flame burnt them deep into the flesh and caused them indescribable agony.

A grim look settled over Frank's features.

"I knew I could paralyze the beggars!" he muttered.

Click-click! went the trigger spring of the rifle in the hands of the prostrate man, and as Frank glanced down at him, he saw the mail carrier aiming his rifle up at him.

The man was drawing a bead on Frank's unprotected face, and at such short range was bound to fatally injure him.

Before he could fire, Frank sent the jet of electricity in his face.

The point only touched the man on the forehead over his eye, and left a tiny mark not unlike a mosquito bite.

Yet the volts pierced the hapless fellow's brain.

He fell over dead.

Not a word escaped him.

He had no time to speak, so swift is the electric current.

Those of his band who beheld what happened were filled with such intense horror that they scrambled to their feet, and ran away.

"He is a devil!" yelled one of them.

The taste of electricity Frank had given the men was quite enough to convince them that if Frank was not infernal, he was possessed of extraordinary powers to overcome them.

Their faith in their own ability was greatly

shaken as a result, and they had no desire to run up against Frank again.

Retreating to a safe distance, they opened fire upon him with their weapons, content to wage war at a safe distance.

Trailing the electric wire after him, Frank strode toward the wheel around which the half-breeds had all grouped themselves, and when he came within a dozen yards of it, he hooked the box on his belt, and withdrew both of his revolvers.

Doctor Vaneyke held the search light trembling upon the men, so that they and the wheel were clearly outlined.

Aiming his pistols at the men, Frank cried in Spanish:

"Retreat, or I shall not leave one of you alive!"

A defiant yell came from the men.

"Do not defy me," shouted Frank. "You ought to know what my power is. I hold all your lives at my mercy."

The men began to shoot at him again.

As the bullets went singing by, or struck against his impervious suit, Frank saw that he would have to have recourse to force.

Consequently he opened fire on the men.

They stood it a moment, and then, as some of their number fell, the rest of them retreated into the darkness.

Luckily Vaneyke bethought himself to keep them exposed in the glare of the search light, and Frank thus had no difficulty in having them constantly in plain view.

Upon reaching the wheel, he took the wire from the box, and passing it through the axle box, he fastened it to the wheel.

Then he retreated to the coach.

Several of the bandits made a rush for the wheel, and seized it with the intention of unbinding the thick wire, when they got a shock that flung them to the ground, for the electric current was now communicated to the metal, as the insulation was off.

Once more in the coach, Frank unfastened the other end of the wire from the battery, assured that once burnt, the half-breeds would not attempt to touch the wheel again.

Securing the wire to the machinery under the floor, Frank started it, and as the wire was wound in, it drew the heavy wheel over to the coach, so that they could rehang it.

Nothing more was done that night.

The half-breeds did not molest them any further.

A watch was posted, then they all turned in, and when day finally broke, it was clear and beautiful.

The half-breeds had stolen away under cover of the night.

After breakfast, our friends readjusted the wheel with a new nut, and finding the knife, it was put on the hub, when they all boarded the car, and Frank started the Whirlwind off for the northward.

CHAPTER XLIII.

UNDER BOMBARDMENT.

"SENORS, you will leave that coach and submit to arrest, or I shall pull the larkstring of this cannon and blow you all to the dev—"

"Never shall we submit to arrest, sir."

"But I, by the holy Virgin, am the governor of Vera Cruz, and command you to obey me in the name of the President of this Republic."

"It was no fault of mine that the coach ran over the soldier of your fort and nearly killed him, as he was warned to keep out of the way, but persisted in confronting it with a rifle, and demanded of us to submit to an unmerited arrest."

"You refused to account to the authorities for your possession of a fabulous amount of diamonds when the soldier was called into the broker's office where you was trying to sell some of them."

"True; but as they belong to me, I came honestly by them, and it is nobody's business but my own where I got them. I had right to deny the information that was asked of me."

"Pooh, pooh, senor, pooh, pooh! I say."

"Finding myself threatened with indignities, I started my coach, ran over the soldier, and thus passed out of the city of Vera Cruz with a gang of the civil guard pursuing me on horseback. And now they have brought the news here to you, senor, you dare threaten to stop me or blow us to pieces. This is an autocratic republic, to my way of thinking, and with all due respect for your political position and regard for you as a gentleman, I beg leave to tell you to soak your head."

"What! Oh, fire and brimstone! dare you insult me so outrageously?"

"Take my word for it, you old jackass, I mean it. Ha, ha, ha!"

And as Frank's merry laugh pealed out on the morning air, he stepped into the pilot-house of the Whirlwind from the front platform and slammed the door shut with a bang.

Upon the top of the fort, a few feet from which stood the coach, there frowned down a grim array of guns, and the governor and a staff of soldiers stood beside one of the guns menacing Frank.

The foregoing dialogue amply explains the situation.

After an uneventful trip our friends, designing to sell the diamonds, had gone to Vera Cruz, and there got in their present scrape.

The gun behind which stood the fat and pompous governor was trained to bear directly down at the coach, loaded with a heavy charge that would easily blow the coach out of existence, and the larkstring was already in the furious official's hands.

One jerk of it would discharge the gun. "We're in a sorry pickle now," said Dr. Vaneyke, regretfully.

"Hope to de Lawd dat he won't shoot dat blunderbust off!" Pomp remarked, casting several uneasy, rolling glances up at the fort.

"Be heavens, ther only way ter do is ter antishipate him," suggested Barney. "Give me yer lave ter plug ther ould tarrier in ther jure wid a bullet and settop his lally-gaggin' wid ther schtring."

"A simpler and better plan strikes me," said Frank, and he started the coach quite suddenly and drove it close to the walls of the fort, just as he saw the mad governor preparing to fire.

A thunderous report rang out.

There came a crash where the coach stood a few moments before as a ball from the gun hit the spot, and a shower of dirt and rubbish flew up in the air as it penetrated the ground.

"We were just in time," coolly remarked Frank, as he sent the Whirlwind along in the shadow of the fort and sized up the best road ahead to pursue. "One moment more and we would have been—"

"In China!" supplemented Barney, with a grin.

"At any rate," said Dr. Vaneyke, seriously, "you have placed us now so as to be out of range of anything, but small arms, and of them we have not the least fear."

They heard a bugle call and the rolling tattoo of a drum beating to quarters in the fort a moment after the gun was fired, and glancing up, they saw the roof and window embrasures thronged with men in uniform, chief among whom was the fat governor.

The utmost excitement was evident.

"I'm sorry I left the coach near this fort, while I went to the diamond brokers," said Frank regretfully. "It has placed us in a dangerous predicament. I thought the place half deserted though and never expected such a case as this."

"We will get a volley as soon as we leave the vicinage of the fort."

"Rifles or muskets can't do us any harm, doctor."

"How about a swivel gun?"

"I don't see anything like one up there."

"If they train a heavy calibre."

"But we can dodge it. See where I am going."

"Toward that bridge?"

"Yes, to cross it, and get toward Mount Orizava."

"It's a volcano. Ha! There goes a soldier who has been listening to us."

"I don't care! Let the soldier rip. Now, about this mountain."

"It is at least sixty miles away."

"We cah reach it in an hour."

"But the guns on the fort?"

"Can't you see there are none on this side?"

"True, by Jingo! Let her drive, Frank!"

And away rushed the Whirlwind out of the protection of the walls of the fort, and taking a lime stone road that led to the bridge, its wheels kicked up such a dense cloud of white dust that it was hidden.

Boom! came a thunderous discharge from the fort. To Frank's dismay a ball went hurtling over the coach.

"They have trained a gun to bear on the coach!" said Vaneyke gravely.

"It will be a hard job to hit us going at our present rate of speed," replied Frank coolly, "yet a stray shot may do it."

Boom! came another violent discharge.

The ball ripped up the ground alongside of the flying coach.

"Faix a barber couldn't give a closer shave nor that," said Barney.

"It will only require a few minutes to get out of range," replied Frank putting on more speed.

Boom—crash! came a third shot, just as he ceased speaking.

It screamed up to the rear of the coach, hit the ground, glanced off at an angle, and disappeared in amid some trees.

"They want to boost us along!" said Frank, smilingly.

Just then the coach went over the bridge with such a furious rush that it was shaken loose from its anchorages.

It was a simple rustic affair, without much strength, and the coach had scarcely reached the other end, when down it went in the stream with a grinding and splitting crash.

The last wheels of the carriage were hardly off it, but the front driving wheels instantly pulled it clear.

Beyond, a brick building arose, around which the road ran, and as the coach swept around the curve, the fort was hidden from view, and they were, for a moment, out of danger.

Still the Whirlwind rushed ahead.

A mile further on she plunged into a wood, but she had not gone far when one of the hubknives struck against a tree and the coach spun around in among a pile of cut logs.

The off hind wheel got jammed fast, unable to go on or back out.

Frank immediately stopped the machinery.

Had he not done so in time, it might have broken.

"We are in a fix, now," he exclaimed, ruefully.

"Let's examine the wheel," suggested the doctor.

They alighted together, and one glance showed them a most alarming state of affairs, for the wheel had cut its way into the split in the rock, and the wonder was it had not broken.

"There is no way to free it but by blasting the rock," said Frank.

"You are right. But we may not have time."

"You fear pursuit by the soldiers from the fort, doctor?"

"Decidedly. If we fail to get free ere they come, Heaven only knows what our fate may be!"

"Then let us lose no time beginning operations."

Tools were procured from the stores in the coach, and Barney and Pomp were set to work drilling holes in the rock to blast it.

It was an arduous, slow process, and while it was going on Frank and the doctor mounted guard to prevent any interruption.

Slowly the work progressed and several hours passed by.

Nothing occurred to interrupt the work.

When the holes were drilled in the rock they were filled with gunpowder and fuses were attached, logs were heaped on the rock to prevent them blowing the coach to pieces, and Frank took every precaution to prevent injury to the wheels.

"We are running a great risk, though," he said to the doctor, "for the explosion is apt to split the wheel to pieces."

"There is nothing else we can do to free the coach."

"Look out. I will light the fuses and risk it."

The three retreated to a safe distance and Frank ignited the slow match and joined his friends at a run.

"The explosion may attract attention this way," said Vaneyke.

"Look to your arms then; we must not suffer capture."

The explosion came, dull and muffled.

They ran back to the coach, feeling nervous and anxious.

"Safe, bedad!" cried Barney, delightedly.

"An' she am frowed cleah offer de rocks!" added Pomp.

The rock had been blasted with such good judgment that it merely split where they wanted it to, and although the logs were flung aside and the concussion drove the coach a few yards away, she was free of the cleft and totally uninjured.

It was a sense of relief to all our friends, and they hastily boarded the Whirlwind and found the interior intact.

To start her off was but the work of a moment, and she operated as well as ever.

"That was well done!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Very," assented Frank. "And now to get through this woods before any one comes, and seek refuge in the mountains."

They were not long at passing through the woods, and meeting with a level plain beyond, away shot the Whirlwind at full speed, with Frank at the wheel.

Within an hour they came to the foot hills of the mountains and were passing through a gorge, when they suddenly came upon a large body of soldiers, who were pressing toward the mountains on horseback, with howitzers strapped on mules' backs.

Hardly were they seen, when a rear guard of infantry appeared in back of the coach, coming from an ambuscade.

Hemmed in on either side by high walls, and in front and back by the soldiers who had come from the fort in search of them, our friends determined upon dashing ahead.

They passed through the cavalcade amidst the greatest excitement on the part of the soldiers, and taking a rocky road to the right, the coach dashed ahead at full speed, rolling, shaking and rocking.

It was the clearest path though, and carried them out of the canyon.

But Frank found himself on a spur that wound up the side of a perpendicular cliff to the mountain top.

The path was rugged, narrow and dangerous, shelving at times so acutely that it seemed as if the flying coach would upset and fall over the edge, down the abyss yawning alongside.

With the pounding of horses' hoofs, the clashing of weapons and ringing shouts the soldiers came pressing on after the coach, trying to get a chance to discharge one of the guns at it, as they came.

Dirt and stones rattle from under the flying wheels of the Whirlwind and fell over the abyss along the edge of which the coach was running. There was no retreat, however, and Frank kept the coach going, choosing rather to topple off the ledge with it than submit to capture or stand as a target for the soldiers' guns.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

ALONG THE DIZZY LEDGE.

"Be careful, Frank, or the coach will fall off the ledge, down into the chasm below. Turn it—to the right—quick, on your life!"

Dr. Vaneyke's voice was low, hoarse, and strained as he spoke, for the situation of the Whirlwind was exciting and hazardous.

Death yearned on one side of the coach in the abyss along the edge of which they were going; death threatened them in the rear, for the soldiers from Vera Cruz in pursuit were pressing on after them hotly; and there was death and destruction ahead, for the breadth of the ledge narrowed to hardly the width of the coach.

On the right hand side arose the high, precipitous wall along the face of which the ledge ran, which the coach was traversing.

Frank heeded the professor's warning cry, for Vaneyke was standing in front of the pilot house, keeping a look-out ahead, while Barney and Pomp, armed with their rifles, were at the two rear windows of the coach, endeavoring to get a shot at the mules, to the backs of which the soldiers had strapped the howitzers.

"Vaneyke, don't lose your wits," admonished Frank, angrily.

"I won't, my boy, but see what danger lurks ahead," replied the doctor.

"Do you think we have room enough to pass the narrow spot?"

"Hardly; and if you attempt it the left hand wheels may go off."

"We have got to risk it."

"In Heaven's name be careful then."

"Should we pause, the soldiers will catch up to us."

"Barney and Pomp perhaps could hold them at bay."

"Only a while, for they would soon get their guns in operation, and a ball or two would send us crashing off the ledge path."

"Slacken speed—quick, for we are upon it now."

Frank deemed it safest to do so, as the knives on the hubs held the coach several feet away from the wall.

"With those knives on, clearly it will be impossible to cross that narrowed part of the ledge," said the inventor.

"Then stop the coach, and I will alight, and unscrew them."

Frank did so.

As soon as the coach paused, the doctor filled his suggestion, and when they advanced again, Frank crowded the coach over against the wall, and she rolled on the narrowest part of the path.

It made them shudder to look down the dizzy height, and see that half the breadth of the left wheels was on the ledge, and the other half overlapping the edge, while the gravelly dirt was breaking from beneath them, and rattling down into the gulf below.

This narrow path extended about one hundred feet before the ledge broadened again sufficiently to give them ample room and despite the fact that Frank crowded the coach against the wall until the hubs grazed it; it seemed every moment as if the coach must lose its balance, and fall over!

The nerves of the travelers were fearfully strained.

an even distance behind the coach, as the Whirlwind made but slow progress going up the steep hill.

Barney and Pomp saw them pause again.

One of the mules was shoved on in advance, and a shot was aimed at the coach with the gun on its back.

"Luck out, they're agoin' ter foire!" exclaimed Barney.

"Watch dis chile drap dat mule!" said Pomp aiming at it.

Before they could prevent it the Mexicans fired.

With a scream a bomb came flying toward the coach.

was crossed in safety and the Whirlwind dashed on to a broad path again.

The doctor was intently glancing ahead.

"Frank," said he nervously, "that shot has loosened the part of the side of the wall ahead, and it looks as if it was going to fall out from the face of the cliff, and strike down upon the path."

"A land slide doctor!"

"Something like one. Ha, look at that dirt falling now!"

"How far ahead is it?"

"At least fifty yards."

"Can we pass it before it falls?"

"I hope so."



The officer waited fully five minutes. Then he turned to his men. "Fire!" he exclaimed. A volley pealed out, and a dozen bullets struck the coach.

They held their breath, hardly daring to speak.

Their eyes protruded, and the color forsook their drawn faces.

Several moments of agonizing suspense followed, the last rays of the declining sun lighting up the awful scene with a golden splendor that was almost a mockery to them.

The middle of the path was reached.

Suddenly a loud report shook the coach.

It was a rifle shot.

Pomp had fired back at their enemies, whom he saw were preparing to fire at them with one of the howitzers.

"Stop!" shouted Frank. "Don't shoot again for heaven's sake, or the oscillation will throw the coach over!"

"Couldn't help it, sah!" responded Pomp savagely.

"Faix they'd a blowed us to glory if he hadn't afoired," said Barney, "an' that'd abe'n worse nor quietly dhroppin' down beyant, widout thim spalpeens havin' a hand in our funeral."

The coach rolled slowly ahead.

In back, coming up the inclined path, there were a large number of the soldiers who kept

It exploded with a fearful intonation.

Far ahead of the Whirlwind.

And harmlessly!

"Kape yer oye on ther mule!" cried Barney.

"It am fallin' offer de ledgde, chile," chuckled Pomp.

The recoil of the gun overcame the firm footing of the little beast, and sent it flying down into the gaping gulf to its death.

A cry of disappointment escaped the soldiers which our friends faintly heard, but they had several more animals, and another one was forced on in advance so they could fire the gun on its back.

"A miss is as good as a mile!" grimly said Frank.

"They will fire again though," the professor replied.

"An' dey am at it now," said Pomp overhearing them.

"Can I foire at ther baste Masther Frank?" pleaded Barney.

"Wait a moment till we get more traveling room," said Frank.

A minute later the dangerous narrow strip

"There is a little more power. I'll put it on."

Frank turned the lever and the rapidity of revolutions of the wheels was increased as the Whirlwind plunged ahead.

They reached the spot where a shower of slate gravel was falling down upon the ledge, and Frank beheld a large mass bulging out as if about to come down and sweep them into eternity.

"Shure it's another gun thim Mexican's be's a-goin' ter foire!" the Irishman yelled. "Let me give thim jest wan wid me roifle!"

"No—wait!" shouted Frank.

A fearful, grinding noise ensued over the coach.

It seemed to fairly leap ahead when down came the immense mass of dirt and rock, pitching right over the coach.

With impish precocity it seemed to have waited until the coach got right under it, so that it might overwhelm the travelers.

"We are gone!" gasped the doctor.

"Murder!" roared Barney. "Ther mountain be's a-fallin' down!"

The coach made one lurch forward.

The dirt slide shot over it.

And missed the rear end of the Whirlwind. She rushed ahead uninjured, and left behind a thunderous noise as the crushing mass struck the ledge and went pouring over the edge in a perfect cataract of dirt and stones.

"Heavens, what an escape!" muttered Frank. "Dar am a barrier behind, sah," announced Pomp.

"Can the soldiers cross it?"

"No, sah!"

"Then we won't be bothered any longer with them, doctor."

"For which I am truly grateful."

"Shure, I have a wasted charge in me rifle," savagely said Barney.

Frank explained to them what the trouble was, and while they were awaiting the doctor's return, Barney exclaimed:

"Shure, an' I don't see how it wuz that thim sojers left ther fort at Vera Cruz aafter we did, an' yet got so far beyant us."

"Oh, it is easy to guess," replied Frank. "You know how we went over the rustic bridge, and it fell as we proceeded on to the woods where one of the wheels got stuck in the rocks which we had to blast? Well, while we were busy there, the soldiers must have started in pursuit of us. Finding the bridge gone, they doubtless crossed the stream somewhere else, and by dint of fast traveling while we were in

"Come on board, then, and we will make the trial."

The doctor complied.

Frank started the coach, and kept it close up against the wall of the precipice as he sent it slowly and carefully around the curve, for as the body of the coach could not bend it had to run its full length before it could go around.

A single trial convinced him that it could not be done without driving the front wheels off ahead of them, and he backed it again.

"Now what is to be done?" blankly asked Vaneyke.

"If a few feet of the bulge was taken off the



Don Ramon laid panting and half senseless on the ground, and as the coach went spinning off in pursuit of the cattle thieves, the girl Juanita sped up to the spot where her father laid, sprang from the saddle with extreme grace, and bent over the old gentleman, relieving him of the pressure of the lassos.

"Wasted, how?" asked Frank.

"Bekase I failed ter foire it at wan av thim Mexicans."

"There is a curve ahead, Frank," announced the doctor.

"If it is short and abrupt we may not be able to round it."

"I can't say how it winds."

The coach by this time was almost at the top of the enormous cliffs, and as they now had no fear of the soldiers getting over the barricade in the rear to follow them, they concentrated all their attention upon the bend in the ledge ahead.

It was soon reached.

Frank slackened speed, and approached it cautiously.

The doctor went out on the front platform.

"Look out, now!" he cautioned.

"Can you see how it goes?" demanded Frank.

"Partly. I'm afraid we can't go around."

This was chilling news, and Frank stopped the coach.

The doctor alighted, and went ahead on foot to calculate their chances, and Barney and Pomp entered the pilot-house.

the woods, they of course reached the foot-hills first."

"But how did they know we wuz a-goin' there?"

"It was the most plausible theory to imagine we would seek safety in the hills, rather than expose ourselves to the open plain, and thus thinking, and guided by the direction we took, that was what probably induced them to look for us over here," said Frank.

His theory on this point was not right.

When Frank was telling the doctor, in front of the fort, that they would go toward Mount Orizava, a soldier had been listening to their conversation, it may be remembered, and this man had posted the governor as to the direction they contemplated pursuing.

While they were speculating over the matter the doctor returned.

"You have a curve of less than fifty feet ahead," said he.

"By careful management we may make it," replied Frank.

"It has got to be risked," briefly said the doctor,

corner we have got to round," said Frank, reflectively, "we could do it."

"What do you propose?"

"To blow off a portion with hand grenades."

"Excellent," said Vaneyke, brightening up at once.

Barney opened the ammunition locker and brought some of the bombs out, when Frank began to carefully fire them at the corner of the bend, and three of the explosives tore an immense abrasion in the rocks more than large enough to suit their purpose.

Then they got on the coach and started it forward again.

This time the Whirlwind easily went around the curve, and in a few minutes more she reached a large plateau at the end of the ledge, and came to a pause in comparative safety.

By looking down over the edge of the cliff our friends could see the Mexican soldiers, on foot and horseback, retracing their way down the spur of the mountain, going back toward Vera Cruz.

The obstruction on the ledge had prevented them following the fugitive coach any further, and they gave up the hunt in despair.

"Our course now is down on the north side of the mountain," said Frank, "and we must get up toward Texas and dispose of these diamonds, so as to return to Readestown."

"Such a vast quantity of the gems excites suspicion of us," said the doctor. "The best way to do is to sell them in small quantities."

The coach was started on a trail Frank observed, and in due course it reached the prairie again, without accident, when the knives were again screwed on the hubs of the right wheels. A run along the coast to Tampico followed.

There was a sullen air overhanging the city, for it was beset by the terrors of anarchy, and a fearful riot was then dormant in the regular, even streets, which was upon the point of bursting forth.

The Whirlwind was driven straight into the city, for Frank was determined to have the coach near him, in case of any more trouble.

Throngs of armed men were passing to and fro, and paused to stare in wonder at the coach as it rolled through the streets.

A citizen informed Frank where he could find a jeweler, and when the coach came to a pause in front of his store, Frank alighted with some of his gems, and started to go in.

Two armed soldiers stood at the door.

There was something so sinister about the general appearance of the city that Frank began to feel uneasy.

He glanced at the soldiers, hesitated at the door, looked at the coach, and then resolutely passed into the diamond dealer's.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE JEW OF TAMPICO.

THE diamond dealer behind the counter was a Polish Jew.

He wore a shabby suit of grease-spotted clothes, an unkempt gray beard, no collar or cuffs, and exposed a filthy, frayed shirt bosom.

His nose was hooked, his hair was bushy, his skin was greasy, he had dirty finger nails and sharp, twinkling black eyes.

"Do you speak English?" asked Frank, sizing him up.

"Only a leedle," replied the diamond dealer, "Vat yer vand?"

"I've got some diamonds to sell you."

"Vell, vy don'd yer show 'em to me?"

"Do you buy them?"

"Always, ven yer offer me a pargain."

"What are these worth?" questioned Frank, lying a dozen on the counter.

The Jew picked them up, closely examined them and asked:

"Vere did yer git 'em?"

"That's makes no difference to you. Do you want to purchase any?"

"Any? Holy Moses, have you got any more?"

"Bushels of them."

"Here?"

"No."

"Vere did you git 'em?"

"Let me repeat it's none of your business."

"How much do you want for 'em a carat?"

"What are they worth to you?"

A sly, cunning look crossed the shrewd face of the Jew, for he saw that Frank did not know the value of the diamonds.

Moreover, it occurred to him that the American had come by the diamonds nefariously, and he put them in his pocket.

"Come around terrormer und I'll dell yer," he said, with a grin.

"Are you designing to steal those diamonds?"

"Hush! Der soldiers outside will hear yer."

"Answer my question!"

"Don't say a word. Ve vill vack ub on 'em."

"Ah, you take me for a Brazilian smuggler or a thief?"

"Don'd gief yerselluf away. I'm mum. Ve vill fix it."

Frank saw that the old rogue wanted to bilk him out of the stones, and with a look of indignation he muttered:

"I see it is impossible to sell those stones in Mexico, for every one regards me with the suspicion of being a dishonest man."

He jerked a revolver out of his pocket and aimed it at the Jew.

"Give me back those diamonds," he exclaimed, harshly.

"Mudder of Isaac, don'd kill me!" yelled the Jew, holding up his hands.

"Hand over my property, you old scoundrel, or I'll blow your head off."

"Murder! Murder!" howled the Jew, dodging down behind the counter.

Frank reached over, caught him by the whiskers, and pulled him out on the floor with one hand, while with the other he pressed the pistol against the old fellow's forehead.

"Hand over those diamonds or die!" said Frank.

Pale, trembling, and bathed in a cold sweat, the old Hebrew complied, just as his outcries brought the two soldiers running in.

They saw Frank in the act of taking the diamonds, and, holding his pistol pointed at the head of the Jew, imagined that he was a thief who was robbing the diamond dealer, and aimed their rifles at him.

"Help! Help!" cried the Jew, in Spanish.

"Hands up, Americano!" cried one of the soldiers.

"What for?" hotly demanded Frank, turning around.

"He is a thief, and has robbed me," said the Jew, whiningly.

"You lie!" indignantly exclaimed Frank.

"We caught you in the act," said one of the soldiers.

"It was he that was doing what he accused me of."

"Oh, senores, protect a poor old man," cried the broker.

"You must go to the jail with us," said the soldier.

"I won't do anything of the sort."

"Resist us, and you are a dead man."

"This is an outrage."

"I had you sent here to protect me against the anarchists!" the Jew exclaimed, running over to the two soldiers, "and as this man is one of them, I demand your protection as a citizen of Tampico."

"You shall have it," assuringly said the soldier.

"He has got my diamonds, and I want them back."

"Oh, the scoundrel!" gasped Frank, indignantly. "He wants to make out a false case against me in order to swindle me out of my jewels."

"Do not believe him!" cried the broker hypocritically.

"Come!" said one of the soldiers sternly.

"Out of this store with you!"

"But I am the injured one!" remonstrated Frank, angrily.

"The Alcalde will settle that, senior Americano. March!"

"I'll fix that Jew for this—"

"Ahead of us! We will fire on you, if you attempt to escape."

"Very well," quietly replied Frank.

He saw his friends in the coach windows outside watching all that was transpiring, and knew that they would aid him.

He walked past the soldiers, out to the street.

The Jew followed after the soldiers, and locked his door to go to the court and swear to a false charge against Frank, in order to swindle him out of the diamonds which he saw were valuable stones.

Out on the sidewalk Frank beckoned to his friends.

Barney and Pomp sprang to the sidewalk, glided up behind the two soldiers, and snatched the rifles from their hands.

Then they pointed them at the guardsmen.

"Hands up, Mexicanos!" said Frank sarcastically to the two men.

They recoiled, amazed, wheeled around, and stared down the barrels of their own weapons, while the startled Jew ran up the street yelling frantically:

"The riot! The riot!"

Instantly his cries brought out thousands of people, all of whom were ripe for the struggle they had begun before the coach entered Tampico.

The diamond dealer's cries almost seemed like a signal to start the revolt afresh against the government.

The two soldiers were terrified to find themselves thus menaced with their own weapons, and one of them cried hoarsely:

"For God's sake, spare our lives!"

"Then run after the Jew as fast as you can," said Frank.

"Yes—yes!"

"If you stop we will fire!"

"You are generous, senior—we will obey."

"Then go!"

The two soldiers ran after the Jew.

It was the most fatal thing they could have done.

The fast gathering mob saw them, and imagining that the city officials had opened hostilities, they fired several shots at the unlucky soldiers, who fell dead in their tracks.

This deed was witnessed by a number of soldiers, who at once summoned a company, and they charged on the anarchists.

A terrific fight ensued in the street.

Houses were set fire to, and missiles began to darken the sky, shouts and threats mingled with the discharge of fire-arms, and barricades were thrown up across the streets, behind which the maddened populace took refuge.

Frank and his friends were amazed.

"What in thunder are they fighting for, any way?" asked the doctor.

"It looks like a civil revolt," replied Frank, entering the coach.

"Anarchists!" said Barney, pointing at the fires that were springing up rapidly in all parts of the city.

"An' heah come mo' ob de sojers," said Pomp.

The rolling of drums, the blare of bugles, and the martial strains of music came echoing through the city.

A few moments afterwards they heard the roaring of cannon.

"It's a rebellion of some sort," said Frank.

"Let us get out of here. We are needlessly exposing ourselves to a lot of risk," said the doctor.

"I am assured that we cannot do any business here," said Frank, and he told his friends what passed in the store.

A few moments afterward they started to leave the city, when a peculiar scene met their view upon turning a corner.

The old Jew was standing in a cart to which a team of burros was harnessed, and was lashing the flying beasts to get away from a crowd of men, women and children who were chasing him.

What the cause of their animosity toward the man was our friends did not know, unless it was that they wanted to inflict punishment upon him for starting the riot.

Frank sent the coach out of the city.

It then shot across the bridge spanning the Panuco.

Hardly had it reached the other side when out of the city rushed the Jew on foot, followed by the howling mob.

He had lost the burro cart by some accident.

"Helb mel!" he yelled, waving his arms toward the coach.

A shower of missiles came flying through the air toward him, and a large billet of wood caught him on the back of the head, knocking him down on the bridge, and he rolled over and over.

Before he could get upon his feet the foremost men in the mob caught hold of him and adjusted a noosed rope over his head, when he was jerked upon his feet.

"They mean to hang the beggar!" said Frank, looking back.

"What could he have done?" queried the doctor, frowningly.

"Started the riot by trying to cheat me, that's evident."

"Poor wretch—see how scared he looks."

"They are dragging him over the side of the bridge, doctor."

"Then depend upon it they mean to suspend him over the river."

"Mean as he was I hate to see him perish that way."

"Let's go back and see if we can't save his life."

"Just what I was going to suggest myself."

"Then go on!"

Frank turned the coach around and steered it back on the bridge.

By this time the mob had hauled the shrieking Jew out to the middle of the structure, tied the end of the rope to one of the hand rails, and were endeavoring to push the old fellow off.

"Once they swing him free of the rail, the fall will break his neck," said the doctor, keenly watching the tragedy.

"No! He has got hold of the rope above where it is tied around his neck," said Frank, "and if he hangs on tightly enough he may prevent his neck being broken by the fall."

"The rope must be fastened tightly around his windpipe already, for his face is turning purple, his eyes bulge, his tongue rolls out, and he looks as if breathing was denied him."

"Heavens! There he goes!"

Several of the Mexicans had lifted the Jew bodily and flung him over the railing down toward the river.

His body gave a rebound ten feet above the river.

Then it began to sway to and fro.

"He has got hold of the rope yet with his hands!" cried Frank.

"See his body writhe and struggle! He yet lives!" said the doctor.

"Then I will save him!" muttered Frank.

"Hold the wheel!"

The doctor grasped the spokes as the Whirlwind shot up to the spot from which the Jew hung and scattered the crowd.

Out on the platform rushed Frank with a knife in his hand, and with one agile leap he was off the coach and beside the rope to which the old Jew was hung, while the coach went on. "I'll return good for evil!" shouted Frank.

"Can you swim?"

"Yes!" gasped the Jew.

"Then down you go!" shouted Frank, and with one slash of his knife he severed the rope, and the old man plunged down in the river.

A terrible yell of rage escaped the mob, and as the Jew's body disappeared beneath the river they closed in around Frank on all sides.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SEVEN MASKED RIDERS.

FRANK faced the infuriated mob, who were angry at him for severing the rope by which the old Jew had been hung from the hand rail of the bridge spanning the Panuco.

The Whirlwind had shot ahead.

Surrounded, Frank pulled out a pistol, and aimed it at the mob.

"Stand back, people of Tampico!" he exclaimed. "I will not brook any trifling with me. The first to offer any violence will get shot down in his tracks!"

The crowd fell back.

Just then Vaneyke drove the coach back.

As it came rushing into the midst of the crowd, they scattered, and before they could do him any harm, Frank leaped on board.

Ahead shot the coach, and she cleared the bridge.

Down in the river the old Jew, with the noosed rope around his neck, was swimming for shore.

From the city came the dull sounds of the riot.

Frank pointed ahead.

"On, for Texas!" he exclaimed.

"We cannot sell the diamonds in Mexico," said the doctor.

"Not without a good deal of trouble."

Away raced the coach, and Tampico was left behind in the fast gathering shadows of twilight.

League after league was covered by the coach, until at last the hour of midnight came, and she came to a pause in a woods.

Barney mounted guard, and the rest turned in.

Not far from where the coach came to a pause, there wound a path across the country made by the stage coach that ran between Victoria and Monterey, off to the left arose a vast mountain range, and several miles to the right was Linares.

It was not many leagues ahead to the Rio Grande on the Texan border.

All the lights on the coach were extinguished, and the moon shone down bright and silvery on the road as Barney sat in the pilot-house.

He was thinking deeply of home, when suddenly his attention was attracted toward the stage-coach road by seeing a horseman galloping by on a fine big black mare.

The man was clad in red shirt, pants that were tucked into the tops of his boots, a felt hat, and carried a rifle.

Upon his face there was a black mask.

The latter circumstance aroused Barney's curiosity.

"Shure an' he must be ashamed av his face ter hoide it so," the Irishman cogitated, as the rider vanished in among the trees.

He was just wondering who the fellow was, when there burst upon his view six more horsemen, riding two abreast, all dressed, armed and masked as the first one had been.

They rode silently by like so many ghosts, and vanished among the trees where the first one had disappeared.

By this time Barney was upon his feet at a jump.

"Be heavens! it may be us they're goin' ter tackle wid their guns," exclaimed the startled and amazed Irishman.

The circumstance was so peculiar as to arouse his suspicions, and he at once proceeded to awaken his companions, to whom he explained what he had seen.

"Did you say the men vanished in these woods?" asked Frank, after hearing the man's recital through.

"I've wan av thim."

"Didn't they notice the coach?"

"Not be look or action."

"My opinion is that they are road-agents."

"Shure they looked loike a masquerade party."

"I will go out and investigate the matter."

"Lord love yer, I'll go along too, fer it lucks dangerous."

"Come on then."

Arming themselves, Frank and Barney left the coach and made their way to the border of the woods, along which the road ran, and glanced keenly up and down.

Nothing of the masked band was visible.

But the keen eyes of Frank detected something else.

It was a strong wire stretched across the road, each end tied to a tree on either side.

Further along the road there were several similar wires at even intervals apart, rising no more than six inches from the ground, and of a color resembling the dust.

"Do you see those wires, Barney?" Frank asked, pointing at them.

"Hello! an' what do they mane, sor?"

"They were put there to trip up horses."

"Bad cess ter ther blackguards as did it."

"The masked men are the guilty parties."

"Shure, it could be no wan else."

"They design to rob the stage-coach, no doubt."

"Ah, now I sees through ther plan. Let's cut thim woires."

"Of course I will. But hark! Don't you hear voices?"

They listened intently for several moments, and soon the faint murmur of conversation reached their ears, coming from amid the trees in back of where they stood.

"Shure, that must be thim," said Barney.

"Wait here. I'll creep forward and see."

Frank glided in among the trees as he spoke, and after cautiously advancing several hundred yards he came to a scattered mass of rocks.

In a clearing among them he saw the seven masked horsemen, yet mounted, clustered in a group and holding a conversation in unrestrained tones of voice.

The man on the black mare seemed to be the leader of the band, and as Frank discovered them he was saying:

"It won't be five minutes longer afore der stage comes along, an' der team goes a-tumblin' over der woires."

"Americans!" thought Frank, judging by this talk.

"Are yer sure as der Monterey jeweler is a-comin' in it, cap?" asked a brawny fellow who was riding near the first speaker.

"I seen him start from Victoria myself."

"An' did yer see much jewelry wid him?"

"He's got a case of it."

"How many odder passengers is dere?"

"Only two—a woman an' her darter, 'sides der driver."

"It'll be a easy job den."

"Fer certain."

"Hark! Wot's dat?"

Back in the direction Frank came from there sounded the pounding of horses' hoofs, the rattling of wheels, and a man's tones:

"Git up thar! G'lang now!"

Crack! went a whip.

The merry jingle of bells on the harness was heard.

"Here comes the coach now!" said the leader of the masked band. "Foller me, boys. Them ere hosses 'll be down soon."

Out of the rocky rendezvous galloped the horses so quick that before Frank could intercept them they gained the high road.

"The woires ain't cut yet!" gasped Frank.

He saw that he had no time to stop the road agents who were then prepared for action, and with his mind filled with misgivings, he hurried back to Barney.

"Shure I can't cut thim woires," gasped the Irishman.

"Why not?" grumbled Frank.

"They are all in wan piece, an' I have nothin' ter cut 'em wid."

"Back to the coach with you, and get a pair of shears to—"

Crash! came a fearful noise from the road, interrupting what Frank was saying.

It was instantly followed by a splitting noise, the scrambling of hoofs, the neighing of horses, the swearing of the driver, and feminine shrieks of affright, mingled with several expressions of alarm in Spanish.

"The horses of the stage coach have hit the wire and are down," said Frank, pointing through the trees. "See there, Barney."

He pointed through the trees.

A sad spectacle met Barney's view.

One of the team had broken its neck in the

fall, the other's leg was broken, and the shaft of the coach was demolished.

Up on his seat the driver stood bent over, with the reins bound around his hands, his face red with rage and alarm, while out of the dusty coach window a young Mexican gentleman had his head thrust, and Frank saw two ladies with terrified faces behind him, clasped in each other's arms.

Down the road there sounded the trampling of many horses' hoofs, and they saw the road agents dashing toward the coach, brandishing their arms and yelling like madmen.

"We can do nothing here," said Frank.

"Begorra we can in ther coach, an' here it do come."

"Vaneyke sees what is going on. He is a trump."

"Git aboard, Masther Frank, git aboard!"

The Whirlwind rushed up to them, paused, and in a twinkling the two adventurers were on the front platform.

"Which way, Frank?" queried the doctor.

"Straight to the road, Vaneyke. Do you see all that is—"

"Everything. Pomp, get your rifle, and go to the rear."

"Golly, can't yo' lemme git up on de roof?"

"Of course; you would make a better target up there than down here."

"Reckon I'll stay heah, den."

With a rush the Whirlwind flew out on the road just as the band of masked men dashed up to the stage coach, and covered the driver and the inmates with their rifles.

"Hands up, pilgrim!" the leader of the band was yelling at the driver, who now had dropped the reins and pulled a big navy revolver out of his belt to defend his passengers.

"Come, thar, shashay off," growled the jehu angrily, as he drew his herculean figure up.

"Ye may riddle old Tom Briggs, but gosh durn my skin ef I'm goin' ter 'low youse ter play a lone han'!"

"Might's as well drap yer gun an' hustle, pilgrim. We've got yer plumb dead-wooded, an' ther Lord help yer soul ef yer kick."

"I ain't no sneakin' coyote, pards, an' I won't cave."

"Then yer'll shinny up ter ther happy huntin' groun's. Fire, boys!"

Several rifles were pointed at the driver when the Whirlwind shot out from the midst of the trees and dashed toward them.

The rumbling of its wheels and the buzzing of its machinery startled the road agents' horses, and made them prance.

In fact, the thieves were as much startled as their mounts, and the leader of the band, who was pulling the young Mexican out of the stage through the window by his head, was forced to let go as his horse reared up and plunged away.

The driver was no less astonished, for the search lights and arc lights were now blazing about the coach and lent it a queer, supernatural appearance that was mystifying.

Frank and Barney fired several shots at the highwaymen.

That gave them to understand that the occupants of the coach were bent upon the rescue of the stage passengers. At the same time the stage passengers realized that our friends were going to their assistance, and their hopes at once revived, for at first they expected nothing but destruction.

The cowcatcher of the coach struck the wires and the sharp, triangular knives with which it was armed drove them up on the central piece where they were severed like threads.

The road agents had scattered to the right and left and the coach made a circuit of the stage.

"Hello, thar!" bawled Tom Briggs, the driver. "Wot in thunder are that thing, an' wha' d'yer mean ter do, pards?"

"Get on board here, and we will help you!" replied Frank.

"Much obleeged. Wimmin fust. I ain't no sneakin' coyote."

Frank shouted to the Mexican to bring the ladies into the coach, and while the young man was so engaged, the outlaws recovered their wits, saw that they were being thwarted by the natural agency of a mechanical contrivance under control of a few level-headed men, and at once became so chagrined and mortified that they resolved to fight.

"Taint nuthin' but a blamed machine," shouted the leader, "an' yer kin hang an' quarter me afore I'll 'low 'em ter win this game."

A shout pealed from the rest, and they fired a volley at the occupants of the stage and the Whirlwind.

The pilot-house shutters were down, and by

the time the shots were fired the Mexican had politely put the two frightened females on board of the coach.

None of our friends were exposed to the bullets.

Old Tom Briggs alone suffered for his heroism in sticking to his post until his passengers were safe, for a bullet winged him, and he fell to the ground from his seat wounded.

Instantly Frank sprang out to his aid.

"Lordy, I'm pugged in ther gizzard," said the old driver, faintly.

"Is it a bad wound?" asked Frank.

"Dunno, pilgrim, but reckon it hurts like blazes."

"Here, I'll carry you into my coach."

Frank did so, and the doctor sent the Whirlwind ahead after the road agents who were up the road.

"Wait, senores," cried the young Mexican in alarmed tones. "I have a case of diamond jewelry which I left in the stage while I assisted the ladies in here out of danger."

"Your courtesy may cost dear," said Frank, glancing back, "for two of the thieves in the rear have secured the case, and are carrying it away."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONCLUSION.

As soon as Dr. Vaneyke heard what Frank said, he turned the coach around, and, abandoning the men in front, he sent the Whirlwind flying after the two masked men who were riding away like the wind in possession of the Mexican's jewelry.

"Follow them until we recover the stolen case," said Frank.

"De robbers am gwine ter fire at us!" announced Pomp.

The sharp crack of the rifles came a moment afterward, but the bullets flattened harmlessly against the wire cage over the coach, and then the bandits came riding after the Whirlwind.

The coach drew ahead of them.

And rapidly began to overhaul the fugitives. Frank examined Tom Briggs' wound and said presently:

"You are all right; it only went through your side."

"Bind it up fer me, will yer, pilgrim?" asked Tom.

"Certainly. I intended to," said Frank, complying.

Barney had a tough job on his hands, for the old Mexican woman and her daughter had fainted dead away.

The Irishman was trying to revive them.

In his eagerness he poured some ammonia down their throats and began to bathe their heads with whisky, nearly killing them.

The young Mexican interposed upon seeing his mistake.

"You are not doing right, senor."

"Och, so I ain't, bedad!" said Barney, in disgust.

Then he drank the whisky.

The Mexican took charge of the ladies after that.

Ahead dashed the coach, with Frank and the doctor in the pilot-house, while Pomp went to the rear end of the carriage.

"In two minutes more we will reach them," said Frank.

"How are we to get the case of jewelry?"

"Do you notice how close the two men ride together?"

"Yes, they are holding the case between them."

"We must sacrifice their horses, doctor!"

"How—by shooting them down?"

"No! Drive the cow-catcher against their legs."

"Ah! Knock them down?"

"Exactly. That will save us a good deal of trouble."

With a rush the coach ranged up behind the flying steeds.

The two road agents glanced back.

Simultaneously a cry of terror escaped them as the blinding rays of light shot into their eyes.

The next instant the cowcatcher struck their mounts, and with gashed legs the unlucky beasts were knocked right and left, falling down so violently that their riders were shot up in the air, the jewel case caromed across the dusty road, and the coach darted between the men.

The Whirlwind paused.

Both men laid senseless.

Out leaped Frank, and a moment later he recovered the case and carried it back into the coach.

"My friend, I have recovered your valuables," said he to the young Mexican, who had revived the two women.

"May Heaven bless you, sir!" fervently ejaculated the Mexican.

"Is the package so very valuable?"

"It is worth over fifty thousand dollars, senor!"

"You are a jeweler of Monterey?"

"My father has there the largest jewelry business in Mexico."

"Does he purchase diamonds?"

"Millions of dollars' worth annually. I am soon to go down to Brazil for him, to make a large purchase of them."

"You need not go. Buy of me."

"Senor, you have saved my life and property. I am very grateful to you, and will gladly favor you in any manner that lies in my power. If you have fine diamonds for sale, go to Monterey with me and we will buy them at a fair price. But I doubt if you have one hundredth of the enormous quantity we need for our own use, and to sell to all the leading jewelers of Mexico who buy of us."

"I have got enough in this coach to supply the whole of Mexico, the United States, and Canada."

"Impossible."

"Then let me show you."

While Frank was exhibiting his diamonds to the jeweler, Pomp went outside, and made prisoners of the two outlaws, and Barney aided him to stow them in the dining-room.

The doctor then, at Frank's suggestion, drove the coach back the way they came from, in order to get in the right direction for Monterey, and at the same time try to make a capture of the rest of the band of road agents.

While the coach was dashing back, Frank told the Mexican how they happened to get the diamonds.

"It is wonderful—wonderful!" ejaculated the jeweler. "Indeed, it seems like some romance. Yet the proof is convincing to the contrary."

"Can you effectuate a sale of the gems for me?"

"Easily. They are free of duty. Hence they lose that extra value, and can be sold so cheap that for a long time there will be a depreciation in the value of diamonds all over the world."

"What is your opinion of the diamonds?"

"They are gems of the first water, magnificently white, beautiful in luster, finely lapped, and large in size."

"Of course that enhances their value?"

"Considerably."

"The sale will cause us no more such trouble as we had I hope?"

"None in the least."

"Then the quicker we consummate the bargain the better."

"I shall do all in my power to advance your interests."

Frank told his friends what the young man said, and a few minutes afterwards they came in sight of the five other road agents, who were speeding away as fast as they could go.

"The villains have taken to flight!" said the doctor.

"Increase speed. We must follow them," grimly replied Frank.

The doctor turned around the lever, and with extra impetus insinuated in its wheels, the Whirlwind increased speed.

Within a few minutes it came up with the outlaws, and although they fired shot after shot at the coach, our friends protected behind the impervious shutters remained uninjured.

"Gimme satisfaction!" said Tom Briggs savagely.

"What do you want us to do?" queried Frank.

"Shoot thar hosses from under 'em."

"All right."

"That'll make 'em bite ther dust so's yer kin corral 'em."

"It shall be done."

"Captur 'em, an' le'me swar 'em inter jail at Monterey."

Frank called all hands, and each one but the doctor took a rifle, singled out a horse, and they all fired together.

Down went the five horses in a heap.

They had all been creased, at side range; that is, the bullets struck the end of their spines, at the bases of their manes, stunned them without doing any harm, and rendered them temporarily helpless.

The five riders were flung to the ground.

Several were stunned as badly as their horses were, and the rest so badly bruised and battered that they could offer but little resistance to

the men who leaped from the coach, which had come to a pause, to make prisoners of them.

As soon as the captives were tied, they were conveyed on board the coach, and laid with their companions.

"That is the last of that band!" remarked Frank.

"Praise ther Lord for that, pilgrim!" fervently said Briggs.

"You can have all the satisfaction you want now."

"An' by gol, I'll take it, too."

"I'll aid you all I can, so I'll tow your stage to Monterey."

"Wot! With this consarn we're a-ridin' on?"

"Certainly. Both of your horses are dead now. You can have those of the road agents, as they caused the death of your team."

"Pilgrim, tip us yer flipper. Put it thar. Mine's honest, an' you are ther squarest tender-foot as ever I see, gol durn me if yer ain't."

While the grateful old fellow was shaking hands with Frank, with a hearty zest, the doctor drove the coach back to the stage, and a line was made fast to it.

Frank then towed the broken stage to Monterey, the thieves' horses fastened to the rear end of it.

Tom was left at the coaching office in care of his friends with the broken stage and the five horses, and the Whirlwind passed into the city arousing everybody's wonder, and put the captive road agents in the hands of the authorities, to whom the facts of their misdeeds were related.

After that the Whirlwind proceeded to the Mexican jeweler's, and ran into the great courtyard where it was hidden from the view of the inquisitive public.

Through the mediation of the young jeweler, all the gems, but one of the largest for each as a keep-sake, were sold.

The sum of money realized amounted up in the millions, and it occupied over a week to consummate the huge bargain.

Our friends, thereupon, divided the money.

Although they all were rich already, the last stroke made them all enormously wealthy.

They purchased drafts of exchange on New York, and the Whirlwind was then taken apart, all her appurtenances, including the coach, were packed in cases, and our friends took a boat on the south fork of the Rio Grande to Matamoras.

From the mouth of the Rio Grande a trip across the Gulf of Mexico of 640 miles to New Orleans followed, and with the coach cases and their money, the four boarded a train for Readstown.

For the last time we ring up the curtain on our drama to show a fleeting glimpse of the several interesting pictures.

The first scene is a fine Texan cattle ranch, over which presides Gerald Fitzgerald and his beautiful wife Panchita, for Frank and the rest had learned her whereabouts and sent her an equal share of the proceeds of their sale of diamonds.

It was fair, as they would never have known anything about the existence of the treasure had not Tom Hardy stolen the paper from her, which her dead father, David King, left her.

With part of the fortune she had re-established her husband in the business which Frascuelo had ruined before the Mexican bandit died in the frightful manner to which Isaac, the white savage, consigned him.

Don Ramon de Castro's beautiful daughter married the man of her choice, and Isaac was never heard of again.

As for the rascals who figured so prominently throughout our story, they all eventually were brought to justice, and paid the penalties of their various crimes.

Frank and his friends secured the \$50,000 reward offered for breaking up the trade dollar coinage on the border, and by mutual agreement sent it as a present to Lasso Larry.

The wonderful electric coach was carefully stowed away, after such repairs were made to it that were made necessary after the rough usage to which it had been subjected, and it may be our good fortune to again chronicle some of its wonderful achievements.

Dr. Vaneyke, Barney and Pomp were glad to get home again, and are yet the constant friends of the wonderful inventor, Frank Reade, Jr.

For the present we must wish them adieu, happy and contented with what they have accomplished, and regretfully say

[THE END.]

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